THE CHILDREN OF

ABBOTSMUIR MANSE

Meigle Public School.

PRIZE

Awarded to

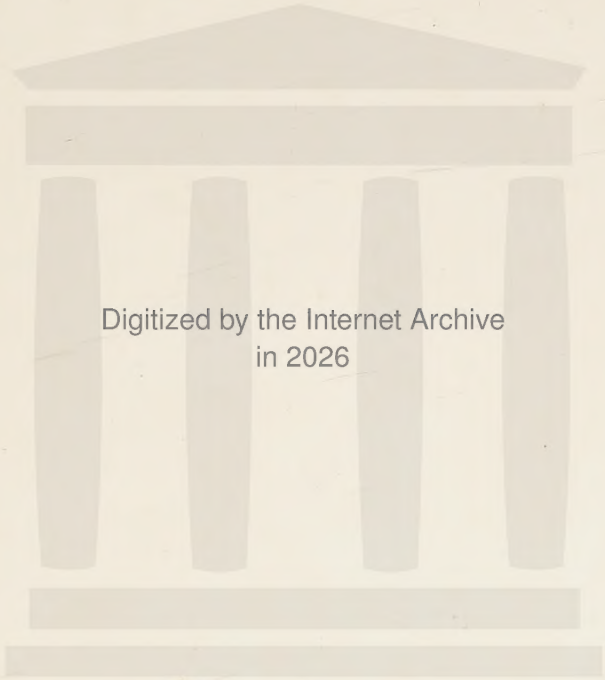
Grace Shanks

2nd in Composition & Domestic Economy

3rd in Reading, Writing Grammar, Bible, French & Sewing

10th Augt 1898 John Bulter Teacher.

MELROSS, PRINTERS, COUPAR ANGUS



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/childrenofabbots0000vari

AT THE BURNSIDE.

THE CHILDREN

OF

ABBOTSMUIR MANSE.

By the

AUTHOR OF "NELLY'S TEACHERS,"
&c. &c.

London:
T. NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW.
EDINBURGH; AND NEW YORK.

1894

All Rights Reserved.]

Contents.

I. THE CHILDREN'S HOME, 7

II. THE POWER OF AFFECTION, 13

III. A SCOTCH SABBATH, 33

IV. THE DAY OF PARTING, 53

V. A LONG LETTER, 69

VI. WEST MAINS, 75

VII. ELLY IN TROUBLE, 98

VIII. UNSISTERLY SISTERS, 111

IX. LOULOU'S DESERTION, 132

X. FORGIVING AND FORGIVEN, 149

XI. AN INOPPORTUNE ARRIVAL, 165

XII. ARCHY'S ILLNESS, 189

XIII. HOW JIM RAN AWAY, 213

XIV. JIM'S HIDING-PLACE, 228

XV. WAITING, 241

XVI. THE LAST LETTER, 260

THE CHILDREN OF ABBOTSMUIR MANSE.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHILDREN'S HOME.

"I pray you hear my song of a nest,
For it is not long:—
You shall never light in a summer quest
The bushes among—
Shall never light on a prouder sitter,
A fairer nestful, nor ever know
A softer sound than their tender twitter
That wind-like did come and go."

JEAN INGELOW.

THE manse stood beside the church, with its back to the straggling houses of a little hamlet, and its front to the moors and the hills. The west wind used to come sweeping against it with tremendous force sometimes, and rock the children in their beds at night; but they were quite accustomed to that it was part of their home feelings and associations. They would not for the world have lived in a lower and more sheltered spot, and lost the view of the far-away, unexplored mountains, outlined dark blue and jagged against the sky; and the nearer, dearer, well-known ones, where the gray rocks and purple heather were familiar to their feet.

The country about the Abbotsmuir Manse was not

altogether wild and uncultivated, however. To the south, across the river, there were sweet green parks and thick woods, in the midst of which rose the gray towers of an old castle: tradition said it had been an abbey once, but was otherwise very vague about its story, though the little Maitlands made the most of what it told. The village cottages had their fields too, and their plots of flowers; but they were not particularly picturesque, and perhaps the manse lost nothing by having them shut out of sight by a high wall at the back.

The garden was not a large one, even though it enclosed church as well as manse within its bounds; but it was quite large enough to satisfy the children—quite large enough too, their parents found, for people who had no gardener to keep it in order. There was room for some flowers and shrubs in front, and some fruit-trees and vegetables at the back, as well as several plots of grass; and the children had bits of ground in it for their own special delight, and a big low swing hung upon two high poles.

The children of the manse were six in number,—four girls and two boys,—Isabel, Loulou, Elly, Jim, Archy, and Dolly Maitland. They were not particularly pretty—which was a great grief to some of them; and no one had ever given them reason to think they were particularly clever, but about that they cared very much less. I think, on the whole, they were rather good children: for they all wished more or less strongly to do right; and nature and their parents' training had made them affectionate, truthful, and obedient. Very happy children they certainly were—happy in their home love and their free country life: sorrow had seldom come near them, and death never; they hardly believed in the existence of such things.

None of the little Maitlands had ever been away from home for any length of time, until Isabel was old enough to be sent to school in town; but when the spring weather came, the country girl, who was not naturally strong, drooped, and fell into delicate health; so she was brought back to Abbotsmuir for the summer, and the children were together again. Their father gave them most of the teaching they got, and taught them well, exacting close attention and real work for a little while in the mornings; but, to tell the truth, never were tasks executed more laboriously and unwillingly than those done by the children in the manse study. After their short lesson-hours were over, however, they were all eager for books and writing. The little Maitlands were inveterate story-finders and story-makers. The stock of childish literature with which they were kept liberally supplied utterly failed to satisfy them; and they were always ready to try any sort of intellectual food that came within their reach, at least so long as it was not served up as a lesson. Almost nothing in the way of history was too dry for them to swallow; and Elly, whose appetite for books was the most omnivorous of all, could find tit-bits in the biggest and toughest-looking of her father's commentaries, and when everything else failed, had been known to set to work bravely on a Latin book with no other help than that of the dictionary. She and Isabel were the chief authors of the family, though all the others followed their lead. They had wearied their nurse and delighted each other by taking to story-telling as soon as they could speak plainly; and their first efforts with pen or pencil had been to print or write their own compositions. Their fancies increased on them as they grew older, until the places about their home, the pet animals that they cared for the games they played, and

especially the history they read, were all drawn into the web of the tales they delighted in weaving.

It was partly nature, but perhaps principally circumstances, which had brought about this state of things with the children. Had they been born in a town, with the bustle of streets about them, and grown up in the exciting and yet monotonous life of school, with plenty of company and plenty of lessons to keep them from thinking much, their imaginary world would probably never have existed. But, you see, they were children who lived in a very remote country place, associating with scarcely any one beyond their own family; and while they had a great deal of time to give to their amusements, they were thrown very much on their own resources for devising them, and were, moreover, often restricted to quiet ones on account of their father and his studies.

I suppose there was evil as well as good for the children in this habit which had struck such deep root into their lives. I do not think it made them self-absorbed, or discontented with realities, though some people might have expected it to do so; but perhaps it had a tendency to render it harder for them in after years to settle into a regular routine of work, or take pleasure in general society.

Yet even though this were true (and I am by no means sure that it was), I should still find more reason to be glad for the children's sake, than to pity them because of this dream-life of theirs. For their stories gave them intense happiness for long hours, knit them together in the closest family bonds, and taking possession of dead heroes and their mighty deeds, made them such real people and real actions to the children that all their pulses would throb with passionate admiration for anything noble that caught their fancy. Their parents certainly never thought it

necessary to discourage their tastes; their father, indeed, had told and read them stories himself, and delighted in doing so, ever since they could remember.

He had not much leisure to give to his children, however, for never was minister more devoted to his work than he. He had come to Abbotsmuir a young man, and given the best years of his life and the strength of his energies and talents to these simple people among the moors. He had drawn the congregation together, and organized it, and watched over it; and the love he bore it was so great that no personal considerations of position, or society, or money, could ever tempt him away from Abbotsmuir. His was indeed a labour of love, but it was labour that was of the hardest: his sermons cost him infinite pains; the visiting of his flock meant miles of rough walking to far-scattered dwellings, terribly exhausting to one not physically strong; the burden of the souls he had to give account for hung heavily on him sometimes. The children thought him harsh with them occasionally—and on some of their faults he was undoubtedly very severe; but he was a very loving father, caressing in his words and ways, unhappy when the children were away from him, and, when not oppressed with ill health or brain-work, sympathetic and even playful, with a tender humour which was ready to enjoy their fun.

The children had a deep affection and some awe for their father; but they almost idolized their mother. Her presence made home and happiness for them all. She was the dearest friend they had in the world; closer to her daughters in confidence and sympathy than the sisters were to each other. There are some whose natures are none the less deep and true because they are so brave and cheerful, and whose hearts never lose the bright freshness

and enthusiasm of youth; the experience of years only giving them a more tender wisdom and a wider sympathy. Such a woman was the mother of the manse children.

I have described the six until now as one body; but in spite of the strong family characteristics which appeared in them all, the little Maitlands had very marked individualities of appearance and temperament. These differences showed themselves more distinctly as they grew older; and the manse children being very near to each other in age, they had all passed babyhood at the time when Isabel came home from Miss Martyn's in Edinburgh. She was then just fifteen years old, Loulou thirteen, Elly nearly eleven, Jim eight, Archy six, and Dolly four.

CHAPTER II.

THE POWER OF AFFECTION.

"Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all the chords with might,—
Smote the chord of self that, trembling, passed in music out of sight."

TENNYSON.

THE children loved every inch of the ground about the manse; but especially dear to them were the grassy banks of the little burn which ran in a hollow in front of the house, just outside the garden. When there had been heavy snow or rain among the hills, the water would come rushing down with quite an impressive sound, overflowing its banks as it hurried on to the river; but when the weather was warm and dry, the streamlet was a very gentle and tiny thing, trickling along its course in so lowly a fashion that the youngest of the children could step over it easily.

The burn-side had been the little Maitlands' favourite playground ever since they could remember. There they had constructed dams and bridges, making themselves often, it must be confessed, very wet and dirty the while; there they practised athletic exercises in the way of running and leaping; and there they liked best to bring their story-books and manuscripts. So that on a bright May afternoon it was by the burn, as a matter of course, that the children were to be found—every one of them, from

Isabel down to Dolly, each occupied as suited him or her best.

A large plaid was spread on the grass, and here Isabel lay, rather than sat, leaning upon her elbow, and gazing somewhat dreamily straight before her. She was tall for her age, and slender, with a slight stoop, which was partly delicacy and partly a bad habit; had a very fair and transparent complexion, blue-gray eyes, and dark brown hair, which ought to have been plaited up, but happened at present to be tumbling down. She, as well as her three younger sisters, wore a blue and white checked cotton dress, and an enormous hat of coarse brown straw, which, pushed as it was, for convenience' sake, well to the back of her head, gave an appearance of quaintness to her whole figure. The accommodation of the plaid was shared with her by two of the other children;—Elly, who had just returned from an expedition through the fields, and was sorting and tying up a lapful of heart's-ease; and Dolly, who was tenderly putting her doll to bed, and hushing it to sleep under a corner of the green tartan. But the second daughter of the family apparently despised the plaid, and sat very upright on the other side of the burn, with her hat lying beside her, and her feet almost in the water, as she knitted a stocking busily. Loulou was the active practical young woman of the household, and looked her character; being a good deal less than Isabel, but appearing tall by reason of her very slight, very straight figure, and the erect way in which she held her head. Though Loulou was the strongest of all the children, she had scarcely a tinge of colour in her cool, fresh cheeks; but her face was bright enough, and almost saucy in expression, for she had a mischievous twinkle in her brown eyes, and her small nose was very much turned up. Loulou's

was the most *un*-classical nose in a family where none could boast of regular features. Her hair, however, was a great consolation to her, for that was very long and thick, and her clever fingers could manage it well. It was all brushed smoothly back from her face, and hung in two broad and massy plaits, safely secured behind by the neatest knot of ribbon.

Elly was more like Isabel than Loulou, but was plumper and rounder than either,—a bright little thing with a lovely complexion, great blue eyes, a wide mouth, and silky brown hair, which was very pretty, but somewhat untidy, as it never would go into regular curls, though it was too wavy to go into anything else. The Maitlands were all proud of Elly, for she was the favourite with strangers—the odd character among the children, who was always doing or saying original things.

It must not be supposed, however, that Elly's importance in the family interfered with the prerogatives of the real baby-queen. Dolly reigned supreme, and her sway was undisputed. A yellow-haired, dark-eyed child was she, with graceful kitten-like motions,—the flower of the family, as far as looks were concerned,—a sweet, wilful, spoilt little maiden, answering to the pet name of Bonnie.

Such were the daughters of the Maitland family, all grouped together on the grass. The sons —two small boys in brown knickerbockers—were busy at a little distance, both on their knees beside the burn, eager in pursuit of a luckless minnow, which had been foolish enough to venture up into these regions. Jim was plump and fair, Archy rosy and brown; the one blue-eyed, the other dark-eyed: Jim, a very solemn boy, who gave forth none but words worth listening to, and those in a very slow and distinct manner; and Archy, a funny little chatterbox, who never

would learn to give up lisping, even now when his younger sister had risen up to laugh at his mispronunciations.

The children would have been vexed indeed to think that any one should conclude a description of their family without giving a place in it to Dandy, the dog, for they quite considered him one of themselves. He was lying now close to the garden hedge, his nose down on his fore paws, his long hairy body (he was some sort of a mongrel terrier) stretched out on the grass like a dingy door-mat. Elly had just remarked that Dandy had taken his place, as usual, where he could hear the conversation; and I think the children really believed that he understood almost every word they said.

The elder girls had been rather silent for some time, and most of the talk Dandy had been having the benefit of was among the younger children, until Isabel roused herself rather suddenly from her meditations, and announced, "I've something I want to propose."

Loulou, across the burn, clicked her knitting-needles rather contemptuously. "Well, what is it?" said she. "Is it a new child for the Families? I think we've too many already. We've got in almost all the names there are; and when you *will* have everybody pretty, it's rather idiotic to have so many. You haven't characters enough for them all either. Lenore is just exactly like Florence, and Elaine is another Edith—a little younger; that's all the difference."

"Oh, this is what *I've* to propose," said Elly; and, as her manner was when she was interested, her eyes lighted up and shone, and she made a jump. Then, landing on her knees close to Isabel, she concluded in a stage whisper, "Let us move Them! Let us move Them altogether from the time of the Wars of the Roses. I know it's very

dreadful, but I'm getting—rather tired—of that period of history!"

Isabel held up her hand with rather an impatient gesture to try and silence her sisters, and turned her face away from Elly's half-solemn, half-mirthful gaze. They had misunderstood her, for she had not been thinking of stories at all at that time; though, to do justice to the penetration of Loulou and Elly, it must be said the case was a most unusual one. But she was no less annoyed by the criticism and advice bestowed upon her, the chronicler-in-chief of the fortunes of the imaginary Families they were all so much interested in. It was very bitter to be told so plainly that there was a good deal of sameness in the characters of her numerous lovely girls, and that she had exhausted all the interest to be found in the strife of Yorkists and Lancastrians, in the midst of which her dear ones had been leading a delightfully dangerous and exciting life for a considerable time. And perhaps the sting of the matter lay chiefly in the fact that Isabel was not without her own suspicions Loulou and Elly were right.

"Yes; come and have done with them all," urged Loulou. "Make new ones altogether, and put them at some other time. Of course we must keep the Fitzclarences; I like them; they have characters; but they can live just as well in any other century, and I want some variety. A new arrangement is what we need. What do you say to the time of the Cavaliers and Roundheads? There were plenty of little Stuarts and Cromwells."

"But what names!" said Elly, laughing and jumping again. "Dick Cromwell, Bridget Cromwell, Betty Cromwell!"

"Mary, and Henry, and Frances are well enough," said

Loulou, "and Cromwell isn't a bad last name. We can change those that had ugly names; we've done worse things than that." And so indeed they had; for the liberties these young people took with the history of the time in which they chose to fix their Families might sometimes have been deemed excessive.

"Give the Cromwells new names if you like," repeated Loulou; "only, I think it's a mistake to make them *too* grand."

"You're both quite out," said Isabel, finding opportunity to speak at last, and using a decidedly offended tone. "I wasn't thinking of our Families at all; I was going to speak about something quite different."

"Then it's sure to be something about Miss Martyn's," said Loulou. "Go on, then, Isa. Perhaps you really haven't told it to us before."

Her face and voice were equally demure; but Elly evidently caught sight of a joke somewhere, for she fell down on the plaid in fits of laughter, repeating gleefully, "Perhaps not! Oh, quite possibly not!"

Isabel felt their conduct insulting, and spoke with an attempt at dignity. "Well, one thing they do at Miss Martyn's," said she, "and I wish you would do it too. Perhaps the girls don't all keep their hair so tidy as you do, Loulou, but they're more polite. They don't giggle and interrupt when Gerty Stuart has anything to say. They listen."

"But they don't listen to what *you're* got to say at Miss Martyn's, you know, Isabel," said Loulou; and the remark was so funnily made, and so undeniably true, that Elly's laughter was redoubled, and the elder sister felt her dignity give way completely. She blushed and she laughed, feeling hurt as well as amused. "If *they* don't,

you ought to," said she. "Do be quiet, like good girls, and let me speak a minute."

Then the troublesome younger members took pity upon her, and held their peace. But though every advantage in the way of silence was now given her, Isabel still seemed to have considerable difficulty in unfolding the plan which had been the subject of her meditation all afternoon.

"Do you know," she began more than once, and then stopped short, while her colour came and went, and she twitched and twisted her hat-ribbons nervously—"I want you all to listen," she went on—"yes, boys and all;" for the two little fellows had come nearer their sister in the meanwhile, and were setting a fleet of leaves to sail down the burn for the amusement of Dolly, who sat and watched upon the shore of the green plaid.

"I'm listening, Isabel," said Jim, in his solemn way.

"Yes, do listen, children," said Isabel earnestly; "for —do you know—I think mamma is very anxious about papa!"

They all took this announcement in perfect silence, which was not want of feeling, but utter want of comprehension. Isabel went on more fluently now she had got a beginning, and scarcely paused a moment to observe the effect of her first sentence. "Mamma's afraid he'll get quite ill again, as he did last summer; and, indeed, I'm afraid he will. And only think! He's got the offer of going to one of the church-stations in Switzerland—to Interlaken, I think—to preach there for a month, and all expenses paid! When the letter came this morning, mamma told me about it."

"And me too," added Loulou quietly; but Isabel was into the spirit of her speech now, and did not notice the interruption.

"Switzerland! Oh, wouldn't *I* like to go there! It would be like a dream coming true, to see the mountains with snow on them in the summer-time, and the glaciers, and the lakes, and the very places where William Tell was. I would almost as soon expect really to go to fairy-land as really to go to Switzerland: and now papa has the chance of going! He may see the things I would give years out of my life to see. Wouldn't it be horribly selfish of us to keep him back?"

The younger children all assented eagerly enough, being relieved to find such a happy outcome from the somewhat dismal state of matters Isabel had introduced them to at first. They were all very fond of their father; but if he were going away to find rest and health, to say nothing of the pleasures Isabel was describing in such glowing colours, it would certainly be wrong to wish him to stay. Perhaps it occurred to them, too, that when papa was not at home they had no lessons, and mamma was with them much more, and they were allowed to be as noisy at the end of the week as they were at the beginning. So they said that papa ought certainly to go to Switzerland, and get well, and enjoy himself,—all except Loulou, who knitted busily on, and never lifted her eyes from her work, but observed, low and distinctly, "He never will!"

"Not without mamma!" said Isabel.

And then the whole plot was out, and the others all knew what she had meant by her long meditation, her hesitation, and her excitement. A howl of dismay rose around her, inarticulate and passionate, but none the less intelligible in its grief and remonstrance. But Isabel's blood was up, and the usually indolent, dreamy girl, spoke with fire and energy, and carried her audience with her.

"We're a selfish set—that's what we are!" said the

eldest daughter of the manse, and she said it as if she meant it. "We would keep mammy tied down to us, day after day, and year after year, and never let her see any thing beautiful, or get any happiness for herself. And we call *that* love! We would keep her even now, when she's worrying her heart out, seeing papa not eating, and not sleeping, and growing so thin and miserable. I tell you, grief about him will make her as ill as he is presently. She knows that rest will make him well again, but that he'll never go to take a real, long rest, if he goes alone. Children! let us forget ourselves, and try to be a little generous for once. If *we* tell mother to go, I believe she will. Are we such miserable creatures that we can't deny ourselves for a month for her sake and papa's? Surely not. Surely we may go and tell her we will try to be good and happy without her for a little while. Let us all try to do our part—I promise faithfully I will try to do mine, if she goes. It's nonsense to talk about filling mother's place, but I promise I'll do my best for you all."

The sensation made by Isabel's speech was immense. The little ones were moved to think of the glory of the sacrifice, not of the greatness of the loss involved in the plan she was proposing. Elly flung herself sobbing on her neck, and clung to her in sisterly love and admiration. "You *good* girl! we'll beg her to go—we'll entreat her to go." Little Archy, who was a very tender-hearted boy, put his head in her lap, and blubbered out something unintelligible about "Swissy-yand." Dolly lifted up her voice and wept; and when Jim gave his solemn sentence that "Mamma *must* go," Isabel felt herself crowned with success. She hugged them all round, telling them they were unselfish and brave, and was so intoxicated with the sense of their heroism and her own, that she entirely forgot Loulou.

who sat still on the other side of the burn, and knitted hard.

"Don't cry. Think of the home-coming," said Isabel. "Think of them coming home strong and well to tell us all about their travels. We'll all go to meet them at the gate;—no, I think we must manage somehow to get to the station, every one of us—Bonnie and all. Think of them coming back, all full of enjoyment, but so happy to get back to us again. Oh, what a day of days that will be!"

So she went on, beguiling the children and herself to forget their grief, till the little ones got excited about the joyful preparations for their parents' return, and would fain have set to work on them immediately, while Elly began to run up and down, shaking her hair, and laughing to herself. She always did that when she was making a story; and now they all knew that the story was about children who did some such thing as they were proposing, and that it turned out well and happily.

As for Loulou, she never lifted her eyes, and never spoke after the very first; but sat straight up and made her knitting-needles fly. And yet words were rising in Loulou's mind, just as hot and eager as those which Isabel had poured forth with such effect. "I'm nearly as old as you," was what the younger sister said to the elder in her heart. "I know as much as you do about most things. It would have been only kind and natural for you to tell *me* first of this grand plan of yours before you blurted it out before all the children! Haven't you the sense to see that I would have more to do with it than any one else? The only sensible thing in all your fine speech was that bit about its being nonsense for you to talk of filling mother's place. You never were much good in the house or with the children; and since you came back from Miss Martyn's

you've done not a single thing but amuse yourself! If mamma were away, it is *I* who would have to do the work, please to remember! Really and truly, though, Isabel, I don't think you know in the least what you're saying. You and Elly get excited about things and deck them up like stories, and make them all seem very grand; but have you the least idea what it will be without mammy, morning, noon, and night, for four weeks and more? You talk about the home-coming; but we'll all have to go through purgatory before then!"

That was Loulou's speech, and she had hard work to keep her lips locked over it tight. It was all true in its way, though she was too hurt and angry to make it kind. But it remained unsaid because Loulou could appreciate what there was of truth in Isabel's words, much as she disbelieved in some of them. She was very observant, and she well knew that her father was delicate and her mother anxious about him; she was very practical, and she saw advantages in this plan for a Swiss trip which it seemed to her were very unusual; she was quite as affectionate as the other children, and she was not going to be the only one to refuse to sacrifice herself for her parents, although she saw most clearly how great the trial would be. Let us do all honour to Loulou, for brave and unselfish she undoubtedly was, all the while she sat there in silence, apparently indifferent to everything but Archy's sock. And yet, when she was so good, it was surely a pity she was not better still. It would have been such a happy thing for her, and for them all, if she could have forgotten as well as kept silence about her own importance in the household, and the slight that had been put upon her, and, believing that Isabel had been only thoughtless, not wilfully unkind, forgiven her then and for ever.

It was not long before Isabel began to notice that she was getting no sympathy from the sister who was next her in age, and, unconscious as she was of any offence on her own part, she felt very much aggrieved. Into the brightest and most romantic of her projects for the celebration of her parents' happy return from Switzerland came the defiant, scornful click of Loulou's knitting-needles. Isabel was very nervous, and the sound became intolerable to her soon. She broke off suddenly in the midst of her prophecies of future bliss, and cried pettishly, "Loulou, I wish you would say something—anything!"

"I wonder what Miss Maria Martyn would do to you if she saw you stooping that way!" said Loulou. "Do try to straighten yourself up."

I think Isabel then felt truly thankful she was not as this sister of hers, prim, unenthusiastic, small minded. She deigned no answer; but rising in as dignified a manner as she could, she turned her back on Loulou, and held out a hand to Dolly. "Come, my darling; it's time we were going to the house. Come, Elly. Come, boys."

Off they all went: Dandy and the boys through a gap in the hedge, Isabel toiling slowly up the steep green bank to the gate with Dolly clinging to her, and Elly running on before, and throwing up her arms in the delight of her story telling. Loulou, left all alone, felt a little ashamed of her crossness, and in consequence thereof jumped the burn, and gathered up the neglected plaid silently, instead of scolding at Isabel for forgetting it. Finding Dolly's namesake underneath, she took it on her arm also, and swinging her own hat in the other hand, hurried after her sisters, and came up with them before they reached the manse door. Their mother was awaiting them in the porch. Though she smiled, there was a shadow on her

face; for it was Saturday night, and Mr. Maitland had a headache. "Come in as quietly as you can," she said to the children; "papa is very busy, and he's not feeling well. Where are the boys?"

Dolly had forsaken Isabel by this time and was in her mother's arms, and Elly was making a circuit of the garden, probably to bring her story to a good stopping-place before she came in; but Jim and Archy were nowhere to be seen. Isabel heeded not their absence, however, nor the question as to their whereabouts; she was too eager to embrace her mother and unfold her plan; the look of care on that dear face, and the news of her father's weariness, rekindled all the zeal which Loulou's coldness had managed somewhat to abate.

"O mammy dearest!" began Isabel; but she got no further than that, for her outstretched arms were suddenly weighed down by a heavy plaid, a doll, and a straw hat, thrown upon them unceremoniously.—"Lou, how rude you are!" she exclaimed, her voice rising with surprise and irritation into a key that made Mrs. Maitland say, hurriedly, and somewhat reproachfully,—

"O hush, hush!"

"It's too bad of Loulou, mother," said Isabel, speaking low this time; but Loulou was already on the other side of the garden gate; and her mother, anxious to prevent more talking so near the study window, had led Dolly into the house. There was nothing left for Isabel to do but to follow quietly, bearing the burden laid upon her, and swallowing her mortification as best she might. This was evidently no fitting time to make her proposal to her mother.

Loulou, meanwhile, had gone off in search of her missing brothers, and had not long to seek, for eye and ear both

guided her. The church door stood open, and on the step lay Dandy (good dog! he knew he ought to go no further), while from within there came a humming noise which was gradually growing louder. When Loulou entered she found, as she had expected, that the high old-fashioned pulpit was occupied by her brother Jim, whose fair round face just appeared above the orthodox blue velvet of the reading-desk. Archy had taken the precentor's place underneath, and was standing with his head thrown back and his mouth wide open, bawling "Baa, baa, black sheep!" at the pitch of his voice.

Jim was the first to perceive the figure of his pursuer, and shouting with laughter, he made a rush down the pulpit stair before Loulou had time to dart up, and escaped by the opposite door. But Archy gave a great deal more trouble before he was ejected. He ran up one passage and down another, climbed over seats and crawled under them, until any of his sisters but Loulou would have lost all breath and spirit. She held out, and caught him, however; collared him, and shook him, and dragged him away, though he made desperate clutches at the pew doors as he passed.

"Howl if you dare, and disturb papa at his sermon," said she, as she took him through the little vestry at the back of the church.

"Don't tsyoke me, yen, You-you," remonstrated Archy; "don't tsyoke me."

But Loulou was too wise not to keep fast hold of her captive till he was brought across the courtyard to the kitchen entrance of the manse, and safely delivered into the stalwart arms of Maggie, the housemaid and nurse, who had a basin of hot water ready to make the children clean before tea.

"I do wish Mrs. Robertson wouldn't leave the church

door open all Saturday afternoon," said the second daughter of the pastor in complaint to the domestic. "The boys were all in the vestry last week."

Mrs. Roberton was the leader's wife, who did the cleaning of the church, and Louise caused her considerable trouble to the minister's family, not at all as giving occasion for scandal. The Presbyterian children had never been trained to think there was anything sacred in the building itself, so Louise was not disposed to consider the church polluted because the boys took a walk through the empty, and frisky sang "Ease, boy, ease, sang" from the preacher's desk. Indeed, after her one impatient remark about Mrs. Roberton, she spent neither words nor thought upon the subject. She had stopped the boys making a noise which might have disturbed their father, and she had got them into the house in case it rained, so was all right.

Louise performed her own toilet rapidly in her bedroom, and then came downstairs to fulfil the duties which devolved upon her as hostess. It was she who brought out the jam and sugar, cut the bread and butter for the children, rinsed the syrup-cups with clean water that did not let a single sticky drop fall on jar or table-cloth, and watched with sharp eyes over the proper division of the scones. Indeed the setting of that note. She had never been a very handy girl, or had much notion of management, and since the time when, as a little child, she had been supposed to look after only her own comfort and amusement. And Louise far from objecting to this state of things or finding herself a drudge because she was serious in general to the family, was usually delighted to be busy, and so glad to have her companions once back again, that she thought no amount of worry

and petting too much to bestow upon her. But to-night she went about her work with a look of defiant self-consciousness, and an intense desire that Isabel should observe how useful and important she was. Isabel, however, did not observe her at all. "She's just thinking and thinking about her grand plan," said Loulou in exasperation to herself every time she cast a quick glance at her sister, and saw how she sat sipping her tea silently, and gazing at her mother with dreamy eyes.

An unusual silence prevailed all tea-time, for the elder girls were too much occupied with their own thoughts to talk much, and their mother's mind was still in the study. Mr. Maitland did not join the party at all; he seldom did on Saturday night. "We'll all go for a walk after tea," said mamma, considering that a general clearance of the house was the best way of keeping it quiet. But before tea was over, the sky had become overcast, and heavy thundery drops were falling. Then Dolly set up a plaint that Dollibella, her child, was still lying on the grass beside the burn, and would be sure to catch cold if she got wet.

"No, no, sweet," said Isabel; "Dollibella is all right. I brought her in."

"You mean from the door into the house, after I had put her in your arms," corrected Loulou. "She would have been lying by the burn now, if she only had you to look after her!"

"Does it matter *who* brought her in, if Bonnie's mind is set at rest?" asked Isabel in a reproachful tone, as she stroked back Dolly's hair and kissed her.

"Well, I'm not sure," said Loulou, nodding rapidly and impressively, as if she could have said much more if she chose. She quite understood that Isabel thought the cor-

rection of her statement silly and spiteful; but she, on her part, felt that her sister's retort, in its seeming magnanimity, was really very unfair.

"Would Dolly like to take Dollibella to the kitchen to see the pudding made for to-morrow?" said mamma, who had been meditating meanwhile on new plans for securing a quiet evening for her husband. "And, Isabel, don't you think you could find something to read to us in the dining-room?"

This family arrangement was not so thoroughly satisfactory as the one which the rain had disturbed, but it was skilfully made too: for, separated from the others, and under the charge of the cook, Dolly would be as quiet and as cosy as a pussy-cat; and the rest of the children were all old enough to listen in happy silence to a story. Indeed the younger Maitlands enjoyed being read to almost as much as Isabel enjoyed reading to them, and that is saying a great deal.

"Then *you'll* lie down and rest on the sofa, mother, and *I'll* mend the stockings," said Loulou.

The emphasis of self-importance and loving appropriation with which Loulou dwelt on her personal pronouns was too much for Isabel's patience, and she felt that she could wait no longer for a more convenient season; her grand proposal must be made, and made now. If mamma was tired, an evening's rest was but a paltry thing to offer her; Isabel would have her take a whole month's holiday!

She slipped from her chair as Loulou spoke, and kneeling at her mother's lap, put her arms round her. "Leave the stockings for a while, dear. Leave them altogether. Go to Switzerland with papa." And before Mrs. Maitland could reply, Elly too had flung herself upon her: "You *must* go! We'll be so good. You've no idea how good."

"You want to get rid of your mother?" said Mrs. Maitland, trying to speak playfully, because the tears were so near her eyes. Some vague thoughts she had had before about the possibility of leaving home with her husband, but nothing of that sort was in her mind just now; she was only thinking of her children, and feeling great gladness and thankfulness because of their love for her. She had not dreamed that love was so great and so unselfish, and it moved her deeply; for well she knew that her girls would look upon her departure as the heaviest loss that could befall them.

"We do want to get rid of you, when it's for your own good, you know, my dear," said Elly, with humour and pathos struggling together in her quaint speech, and shining out of the depths of her blue eyes.

"Elly and I think the same," said Isabel. "We were talking it over this afternoon; even the little ones think you ought to go. Even Dolly thinks you ought to go and see the beautiful things. Don't you, lambie?"

When Dolly nodded her fair head with grave decision, and opened her rosebud lips to say "'es," I think Mrs. Maitland for the moment was of opinion that there were no such beautiful things in all the world as those to be seen within the Abbotsmuir Manse. And some understanding of her thought came to Isabel, who still knelt at her feet, for she added eagerly,—"You must forget us, and think of papa. We mustn't let him get ill again like last summer. Do as we ask you, and go with him to Switzerland, and I believe it'll make him well for ever so long. We'll be such good elder sisters, Elly and I; we'll surely manage to make up a mother between us!"

"You'll not call us our own names when you come back," put in Elly; "you'll call us Kennetha and Nor-

manna, and Murray instead of Maitland, for you won't find such good manse children anywhere out of 'Anna Ross'!"

Then Jim gave his solemn verdict from the end of the table, where he had still quietly kept his seat. "Dandy's wagging his tail. That means mamma is to go to Switzerland." And Archy gabbled his brother's words over again in his own peculiar language, with much admiring laughter at the sagacity of Dandy, who, I am afraid, had been thinking of nothing but his own ever-lessening chances of getting a piece of biscuit before the tea-things were cleared away.

So all the family had given their opinion except Loulou. None of her brothers or sisters had taken any notice of her in the matter; Isabel, indeed, thought she showed both kindness and tact in ignoring her altogether when she poured forth the result of her deliberations to her mother. But the omission was too marked for Mrs. Maitland not to be aware of it; and she, who loved all her daughters equally, and knew them all thoroughly, did not fail to guess a good deal of what had happened that afternoon. So while the others clung about her with tender words and caresses, her eyes turned more than once to Loulou, who had risen now, and was restoring the things to the press with a pretty successful pretence of indifference to what was going on.

"We all mean it, mamma; we are quite in earnest," said Isabel, still kneeling on the floor, and raising her delicate, flushed face to her mother's.

But Mrs. Maitland turned round with a smile, and stretched out a detaining hand to her second daughter as she passed her chair. "What does my Louly say about it?"

The girl did not answer immediately, though she was generally very ready with her words. But as she stood looking into the face that was dearest to her in all the world, the anger and envy died out of her heart, and there kindled in those sharp brown eyes of hers a love-light that was quite as tender as that which shone in Elly's soft blue ones.

"Your Louly says you ought to go."

And in a moment after Loulou had spoken she was on the floor by Isabel's side, and each of the elder girls had one of her mother's hands, while Elly ran up and down the room in a state that was somewhere between laughing and crying.

"God bless you, my darlings," said Mrs. Maitland at first, still thinking only of the warmth and unselfishness of her children's affection. But as the idea occurred again more forcibly that the journey they proposed might be really practicable, she added, with a smile, "What all my daughters vote for is surely worth consideration." Then, with a sigh which was at the remembrance of the weary worker in the study, she finished up, rather wistfully, "If it would only do your father good!"

CHAPTER III.

A SCOTCH SABBATH.

"The Sundaies of man's life,
Thredded together on Time's string,
Make bracelets to adorn the wife
Of the eternall, glorious King.
On Sunday heaven's gate stands ope;
Blessings are plentifull and rife—
More plentifull than hope."

GEORGE HERBERT.

IT would be a mistake to suppose that the journey of Mr. and Mrs. Maitland to Switzerland became a settled thing upon that May afternoon when the children planned it on the grass beside the burn, and proposed it to their mother at tea in the manse dining-room. But it began to be talked about as a possibility from that time; and as it became more and more clear that complete rest and change were needed for Mr. Maitland, his wife flung all her influence into the scale of the Continental trip; and even the people of Abbotsmuir added theirs, by begging their minister to leave them for a while, before his health completely gave way.

He was very unwilling at first, being just in that state of nervous ill-health when any decided move seems disagreeable, and the idea of yielding oneself up even to partial invalidism almost irritating. Besides, he was wedded to his work and his home; he loved Abbotsmuir

and he loved his children almost too fondly; he did not think he could be happy away from them. His wife pleaded that, for their sakes as well as his own, it was his duty to take care of his health; that change of air and scene was good for body and mind, and a time of absence would enable him to return to his congregation and his family with new energy and fresh ideas, which would be all so much gain to them. The girls, who were seldom shut out of the family councils, aided their mother's arguments to the best of their ability, much pleased that they could take part in a matter so important, and doubtless contributing not a little to the end they had in view by their unselfish enthusiasm about the grand sights which they were not to see, and the cheerful bravery with which they promised to do their best alone at home. And at last Mr. Maitland yielded to wife and daughters; perhaps only half convinced then that they were right, though he granted it fully afterwards.

As for Mrs. Maitland, happy as she had been at Abbotsmuir, she was not without longings sometimes for a wider horizon, and she was young and adventurous enough still to look forward to the prospect of foreign travel with a mental bound of delight. I do think that if she could have managed somehow to take all her children with her, the going to Switzerland would have seemed pure, unmingled joy; as it was, she resolutely shut her eyes as much as she could to the trials of the separation from them, resolved that nothing should damp the courage she must show for her husband's sake.

So she studied maps and guide-books diligently, and planned routes; and she got her own travelling outfit and the children's summer wardrobe prepared: her practical daughter being her chief assistant in all these matters,

though none of the girls failed to be interested in whatever was occupying their mother. Indeed, Isabel's talk about the wonderful people at Miss Martyn's was at this time almost entirely confined to such descriptions and details of foreign life as she had heard from the French and German governesses, and the girls who had been abroad. Also she read "Anne of Geierstein" aloud in the evenings to the family party, while Loulou was helping to hem frills or lengthen little frocks. And Elly was understood to be writing an English drama of "William Tell," before which the fame of Schiller's German one was destined to wax pale.

In this way the couple of weeks which intervened between the final decision and the time of departure for Switzerland were well filled up, and the fated Monday seemed to draw near quite suddenly at last. On the morning which preceded it, Isabel awoke from sleep only to fall into a fit of deep and prolonged sighing; and Elly, standing at the window of the girls' room in her nightgown, exclaimed dolefully—

"Oh, what *ever* shall we do for a whole month without mammy!"

"She's not gone yet," said Loulou, who, always the earliest riser, was now nearly dressed. "Don't let us think of it till we must.—Isabel, if you want me to do your hair, get up immediately, girl."

Thus Loulou promptly checked anything like sentiment; but her sisters were wise enough to see that in this case she was right, and that it would be well for them all to hold out bravely to the last, and ignore as much as possible the terrible fact of the separation that was to begin on the morrow.

On Sabbath mornings the manse family assembled round

the breakfast-table earlier than usual; but Mr. Maitland had sometimes spent hours in study before then. When it was fine weather, as on this particular Sunday, it was no uncommon thing for him to be out pacing the garden between five and six o'clock. His little daughters would hear his footsteps on the stair sometimes as he went down, and, turning round on their pillows, compose themselves to sleep again, in happy security that it was not nearly time yet for them to rise. But Mrs. Maitland could not take matters so coolly: Saturday night was never one of sound sleep for her; and she, too, had a way of looking anxious and tired on the Sunday morning at breakfast.

The children's faces were generally bright enough, however; and in spite of the unusual silence, the meal was a festival one to them. They all wore their best dresses, and that in itself was enough to impress them with a certain solemnity and satisfaction; and they breakfasted with their parents,—porridge did not make its appearance at all on that morning. I believe they would have considered it a breach of the Sabbath if it had done so.

Afterwards there followed what the boys rather irreverently called a "nice short worship;" Mr. Maitland always choosing a psalm on Sunday morning instead of the chapter in the usual course of reading. And then came a very quiet time in the manse, when the minister betook himself to the study or the garden, and the children were busy and happy enough in the dining-room over their story-books or pictures.

Of late, since Isabel had been given a class in the Sunday school, her father always took her with him for a little while at this time to go over the lesson she was to teach the children. However busy or tired he might be, this was never omitted; and, indeed, I do not know how

Isabel, in her shyness and inexperience, could have got on without his help. Her class did not hear much from her that was original, but she used to repeat her father's remarks and questions very faithfully; and perhaps the children were all the better off because the instructions they received really came rather from their minister than his daughter. So it was no wonder Isabel's courage gave way for the second time that morning, as she came in with her Bible and catechism from the garden, dolefully occupied with her teaching prospects for the next four Sundays.

"I think I must really give up my class till papa comes home again. I'll never find anything to tell them," she exclaimed, appearing with a disconsolate face at the dining-room door.

"Study the Puritan divines," said Elly, who was curled up at one end of the sofa, with her hair hanging about her face, and a bulky volume on her knees; while Loulou opposite sat cool and tidy, with a fresh-looking magazine in her hand, and her plaits all trim and glossy.

Isabel shook her head, and did not look at all comforted, but refrained from more complaints just then, because mamma was in the room, and perhaps not so busy reading as to be deaf to any expressions of misgiving about the Swiss trip.

"Study the Puritan divines," said Elly again; "that's where papa gets all his sermons."

"Elly! he makes them up out of his own head," said Jim, reproachfully; whereat there was a little giggling among the girls, which effectually dispelled for the time-being any dismal shadows in their minds.

Then they all settled down to their reading again; Jim being very busy with his Bible, finding out the longest

and shortest texts—a task he had set for himself, and which afforded him immense though silent satisfaction.

It was a pretty sight in the manse dining-room that Sunday morning. No wonder Mrs. Maitland let her book lie in her lap for a while, and gazed around her with proud and tender love. The blinds were down to keep out something of the forenoon sun; and in the soft yellow light of the little room, the girls, all dressed in fresh white frocks, bent their sweet faces over their books. Archy's dark head was close to Dolly's bright one, as they knelt at one chair, turning over a packet of pictures, while Jim stood at the table, his brow on his hand, reading with all his might.

"Look, mamma!" said Dolly, holding up one of her treasures; "that's Dsoppa." Then she added, with profound scorn, "Artsy says, 'Yoppa!'"

Poor Archy, who was very sensitive about his defects of speech, blushed violently, and poured forth a somewhat unintelligible vindication of himself from Dolly's charge. He could not understand why his mamma stopped him with a hug and a kiss, and then did the same to Dolly; and perhaps Mrs. Maitland herself felt that the action must seem unnecessary to Archy, and that her conceited small daughter was more deserving of a reproof than a caress. But her mind was almost full of the thought, that before another Sunday morning came round, hundreds of miles would lie between her and her children; and though she said nothing about it to them, she went up to her room a little earlier than usual, and doubtless committed the charge she was about to leave into the hands of the Almighty Guardian, whose love is never hampered by distance or mortal cares.

Before eleven o'clock the children were warned, by

several well-known signs, that it was nearly time to prepare for church. A heavy step and masculine voice in the kitchen announced that the beadle had come in for the keys. And presently there was a knock at the study door; which meant a request for the list of psalms to be sung, in order that suitable tunes might be chosen beforehand. As Mr. Maitland was still in the garden, Loulou carried pencil and paper out to him there, and brought back the written slip to worthy Robert Smith, the precentor, waiting modestly in the lobby; who received it with a grave and yet humorous smile, and a "Thank you, Miss Lou*ysa*," which sent her off to her sisters again in great indignation: for Loulou disliked her own full name, considering it too long and too stiff, and with the termination the Abbotsmuir people were apt to give it, utterly hideous.

When the children went to dress, they saw from the upper windows the congregation coming along the high-road and the field-paths; all in leisurely fashion, for at Abbotsmuir the custom was to start for church early enough to have several minutes of waiting before the service began. The manse children knew them all in the distance, and stood for a little to watch and make remarks; but not long, for it was a serious matter (as Mrs. Maitland and Loulou well knew) to get so large a party ready for church. It was done, however, and in good time. Even Archy had his gloves and necktie and handkerchief all right when the first stroke of the bell summoned the children and their mother from the manse door.

A low beech hedge and a little iron gate separated the inner garden of the manse from the one where the church stood; which in its turn was shut off from the road by a high wooden fence and door. And under the garden trees, and on the grass beside the burn, the people were standing

in groups, for comparatively few cared to enter the church until the last moment. The bell-rope hung just above the church door; and the beadle stood in front, and tugged at it lustily, with his eyes fixed, and a look of solemn determination on his face. One by one the manse children passed underneath the rope, all stooping their heads as they went, though there was not the slightest need. Then they hurried into the church, and took their places in the square pew at the side of the pulpit, which was known as the "minister's seat."

I wish I could say with truth that the little Maitlands always behaved well during the service, and were an example to the other young people of the congregation. But, unfortunately, they were all possessed of risible faculties which were very easily moved; and the shape of their pew afforded them opportunities of observing each other's faces and actions which would have been very trying for any child's self-control and sense of decorum. So I am bound to confess that there were occasions when the minister's seat presented anything but an edifying spectacle. Such had been the case on that memorable Sunday when Robert Smith's bees swarmed, and he came to church with one in his beard; which fact he discovered, to his own great discomfiture and the utter failure of the psalmody, when he stood up to "raise the tune." Much the same, too, had happened not long ago, when four babies were brought to be baptized, and they performed a quartett of screaming, all in different keys and with great strength of voice. Nor were the manse children less liable to be affected to laughter by such family incidents as Dolly putting her feet on the table to show off her new boots; or Isabel jumping and shuddering with a scarcely suppressed scream when a huge brown moth came flapping

and fluttering upon her from the window above. But, on the whole, they were generally good and quiet; and I think to-day they were all full of good resolutions about their future conduct in church, though somewhat nervous at the thought of the four Sundays when there would be no mamma to sit between Archy and Dolly, and keep watchful eyes upon them all.

As the bell ceased, the male part of the congregation poured into the church; and then the minister appeared from the vestry, walking quickly up the passage in his gown and bands, and darting one sidelong glance at his children in the square pew before he ascended the pulpit stair. There was a moment's pause while he sat with bowed head behind the desk; and when he rose to give out the psalm his wife looked anxiously up at him, and forgot to find the place in her Bible, for his voice was trembling and his face very white. Even the girls were somewhat uneasy, remembering one Sunday last summer when papa's strength altogether failed him, and he had to come down from the pulpit, and mamma followed him to the vestry, and the rest of the service was conducted by one of the elders, who stood at the precentor's desk and read a sermon of Spurgeon's. But to-day, when Mr. Maitland had read a chapter to steady his voice before the prayer, he got on better: and mamma looked relieved, and composed herself to enjoy the service; while the children also composed themselves, and began to dream. In after-years how grieved they will be that of all the sermons heard from their father in childhood, nothing remains to them but perhaps the memory of some searching question, or a text which had been quoted with peculiar solemnity of tone! But they had no idea of that sort in their minds then, as they sat studying the faces of the congregation,

wondering how some of them could keep so still, and look so steadfastly in one direction; but seldom thinking, even when they saw tears gathering in the eyes they were gazing into, that anything the earnest voice above them was saying could be within the sphere of their own necessities or interests. Nay, sometimes, while the father was explaining, with tender, solemn words, the way to heaven, the children, all unheeding, were trying to puzzle it out in a fashion of their own; thinking that if Jesus would only appear through the roof, they would willingly risk their lives in climbing the pillars to reach him; or longing that the narrow road was a real earthly path—that they might take it, and *know* they had taken it, and, even at the expense of leaving all their friends behind and encountering dangers innumerable, manage to arrive at last in the Celestial City.

So the sermon passed over, and the singing and the prayer; and the square pew was again all in excitement when the time came for the collection being made. This was done in the regular old-fashioned way—the deacons handing round long wooden ladles just before the benediction was pronounced. The manse children had each their penny ready long before their turn came; and when Dolly held her contribution up high, and dropped it among the others with a loud clink, a smile went round all their faces, and passed on to the young people of the choir, who bestowed a good deal of attention upon the minister's seat.

The Sunday school was held in the church just after the service, because many of the scholars lived far away, and could not come back in the afternoon; so, when the congregation dispersed, Isabel remained behind with the other teachers, waiting, half in trepidation, half in pleasure, to take charge of her five little girls. The younger children

of the manse went off with their mother, for Mr. Maitland was of opinion that Sunday schools were only necessary evils, and that the proper place for instructing the little ones on Sabbath was in the family at home. So the rest of the Maitlands assembled in the dining-room, and it was not very long before they heard through the open window the school children singing their hymn of dismissal; and Isabel came hurrying home, flushed and panting, eager to tell her father of her experiences.

The Sunday dinner was always a cold one, but contrived to be somewhat daintier than usual, and the children's appetites seemed peculiarly keen on that day. As usual, Mr. Maitland left the table early, in order to take a short rest before he began his preparation for the evening service; and his wife went with him, to settle the study sofa-cushions comfortably, and bring the room to a proper degree of darkness. And while she lingered in the study, the children went upstairs to make ready for her coming; for they always spent Sunday afternoons in her room, that the downstairs regions might remain in profound quiet. In the winter time they exercised their ingenuity in arranging all the different seats in a comfortable circle round the fire, with the table beside their mother's chair, and a big screen carefully put as a protection from the draught of the door. But in this warm weather the great object was, of course, to get near the window. The rocking chair for their mother was put close to it, with the little wooden stools for Archy and Dolly at each side; and the others made arrangements for distributing themselves in the neighbourhood as comfortably as they could. The arranging of the table was Isabel's business, though it was not generally done without some interference from Loulou, or criticisms from Elly, about the tasteful disposal

of the books they were going to read, and the artistic effect of the flowers which filled the glass in the centre. But any shadow of a quarrel vanished at the appearance of their mother; and the Sabbath afternoon glided peacefully away while the children went through their Bible-lesson, and repeated texts and catechism, then settled down into attentive quietness to hear mamma read aloud. When that was over, there was generally some repeating of hymns; and Isabel, who delighted in religious poetry of a certain sort, went through martyr lays and sacred ballads at great length and with much enthusiasm. Mamma was generally a very patient listener, but the younger children had a way of turning to their picture-books in the midst of their sister's most thrilling passages, and Loulou seemed to depart very willingly when the time came for preparing tea. It was always early on Sunday night, and one of the girls carried Mr. Maitland's cup to the study, and laid it silently on his desk beside the books and papers, from which he scarcely looked up as she came in.

Only the older children went back to church; and to-night mamma herself stayed at home with Archy and Dolly, and they sat in the study, and looked at the large picture Bible which had delighted the infant eyes of all the Maitlands in turn. The first volume was the favourite, for there one could see a full length portrait of the high-priest, in his strange, beautiful garments. The table with the shewbread, the brazen altar, and the candlestick with its seven branches, were all there also. The other volumes were much less interesting, as containing fewer pictures, and those only of places—towns, and hills, and lakes, such as you might see in other rooms and at other times than in the study, in one of papa's big books, on Sunday night.

Had not Dolly herself a packet of "Views of the Holy Land," as well as a large picture of Jerusalem, which was pasted on the nursery wall, just above the chest of drawers?

But even the despised second and third volumes had their part to play that evening; and the little brother and sister had nearly come to the end of them all when the church-goers returned—first the girls with Jim, and then their father, looking tired but relieved. Dandy came from under the sofa to greet them, wagging his tail, and distending his mouth in a friendly grin, after a fashion which the children believed no other dog could imitate. And then came the pleasantest time of the day for the little Maitlands. Their father's work was all done, and he gave himself up to them for the rest of the evening.

Sometimes they would try to puzzle each other by asking Bible questions or fixing on Scripture characters; sometimes (but that was chiefly on winter nights around the fire) they would fall into solemn talk about some such mystery as the state of the blessed dead, or the millennial glory and the second advent of our Lord. Elly's eyes grew enormous then, and she became too excited to sit still. Such themes were her delight, while Isabel's tastes lay rather in history and biography; and she liked best to talk of the trials and triumphs of saints and heroes in bygone days—of the martyrs at the Reformation time, of the Covenanters and their sufferings on her own native moors, and of the Pilgrim Fathers, who sought freedom across the sea, and made new homes for themselves in the distant West.

Loulou generally took her part in these conversations by means of short inquiries and remarks, which were always sharp and well-worded, but sometimes intended to help out her sister's ideas, and sometimes to make fun of them.

But there were neither questions nor discussions that night. Papa was tired, and perhaps sad, and the conversation was rather disjointed. According to custom, the little ones sat up to prayers and the early supper—Dolly being in great glee, as she always was on these occasions, and disposed to tyrannize over her father, now that he had leisure to fondle her. She kept triumphant possession of his knee, and though she did not condescend even then to speak much, she tried to overwhelm him with caresses, rubbing her soft cheeks and hands against his face, and exulting over him with cooing laughter.

When the younger children had gone to bed, the others strolled into the garden with their parents; Isabel clinging to her father's arm, and Loulou and Elly trying to walk on each side of their mother along the narrow paths. But the shadow of the coming separation was over them all, though no one was willing to confess it. They admired the evening lights on their own dear hills; but when Mr. Maitland sighed as he looked, Isabel squeezed his arm and reminded him he was soon to see the Alps; and Elly cried out from behind that papa and mamma would call the Grampians *hillocks* when they came back from Switzerland.

Then, perhaps to turn the conversation, Mr. Maitland asked the girls what they had been reading; and Loulou complained that the new numbers of their juvenile magazines were full of stories about waifs and city Arabs, and that she was getting tired of that sort of thing now. Her mother, too, expressed her opinion that there were too many of these narratives in the present day; and said that her sons and daughters were more familiar with low London slang than with their native dialect, owing to the excellent opportunities they had of studying the former in their religious books.

"Some of the first of these stories were beautiful—so fresh and so pathetic; to my mind the prettiest that ever were written. But so many have been made on the same pattern lately, that I almost agree with Loulou. I can find scarcely anything now to read to Archy and Dolly that has any other moral than kindness to the poor. If they are to judge by their stories, I'm afraid they will begin to think almsgiving the whole duty of man."

"And why shouldn't we be kind to our equals?" said Elly with a leap, "instead of always to the Poor with a capital *P*?"

Papa and mamma exchanged glances of amusement over their little daughter's head, and the older sisters laughed delightedly. It was almost a wonder that the Maitlands did not spoil Elly—as they certainly did spoil Dolly—with the openness of their love and admiration. But in spite of her quaint cleverness, and odd, old-fashioned ways of speaking, there dwelt within her soul a sweet and childish simplicity which left but little room for vanity and self-love to find a lodging. She threw up her arms again and laughed, but with pleasure, not with pride, when Loulou said,—

"Elly's writing a story just now in imitation of the magazine ones. She calls it 'Little Beetroot and her Pillow.' The scraper on a door-step was little Beetroot's pillow. She was called Beetroot, because she sold beetroot; she didn't know whether she had any other name."

"Be quiet, Loulou," said the authoress, with a sudden qualm of conscience. "I don't think it's for Sabbath."

"I suppose there are fashions in stories as well as in other things," observed Isabel meditatively. "It's all ragged boys and girls now, and getting them into Homes or out to Canada; but mammy's old books and Aunt Annie's are

all about girls and boys who died. They generally had long illnesses, and said a great many good things in long stiff speeches. I suppose it must be true they said the *things;* but, even if people were more proper long ago, could quite small children have used such big words? I liked these books very much, though, when I was little."

"Oh, don't we know you liked them!" cried Loulou. "Once, after you had been staying at grandmamma's, you could think of nothing but Aunt Annie's books; and you brought some of them home with you.--Mamma! she used to sit in the swing, and do nothing but make up stories about little boys and girls that died, and invent diseases and grand speeches for them. She used to mutter away to herself half aloud; she didn't care whether any one was listening or not. And when she was getting on well, and killing her children off fast, she used to chuckle to herself, and send the swing up high."

None of the Maitlands could help being amused at the description of Isabel's delight in her doleful stories, though the girl herself blushed and winced, and her parents looked rather grave as they smiled.

"Indeed, indeed," protested Isabel, "I meant it all. My stories weren't like Elly's 'Little Beetroot.' They weren't done for scolling. They were copied from auntie's books out of pure admiringness."

"*Admiration*, please," said Loulou. "Of course. That was what made them so funny. And do you remember the piece of poetry you made about an imaginary dead child, to console its imaginary mother?

> 'O mourn not for him! he has gone to his rest;
> Your darling is reposing on—'"

"That will do, Loulou," said her father, rather sternly.

For the girl, in her endeavour to make her sister ridiculous, would soon have been rattling out sacred words, as she showed up these old compositions of Isabel's, which had been made in foolishness, perhaps, but certainly not in irreverence. And Loulou, who hated to be rebuked, fell rather sulkily to the rear of the party, and began to whisk the leaves off the hedge as she went along.

There was a little silence, and then mamma spoke, very tenderly, and not without taking some guilt to herself for having, as it were, encouraged the conversation at first. "I'm afraid we are apt to forget," she said, "that, whatever the stories about them may be, cold and hunger, and sickness and death, are all real things. God has been very good to us, and kept us very safe, so that you scarcely know about them except by hearing. But if that very goodness of his makes us careless and unfeeling—how very sad, how very dreadful that will be for us all!"

Isabel clung closer to her father's arm, and Loulou ceased pulling off the beech leaves, as her head drooped in shame. Elly was the only one that spoke, and she did it with an outburst that was very much like a sob. "I won't finish 'Little Beetroot and her Pillow;' I'll put her in the kitchen fire! I can't to-night, because it will be out; but my manuscript will help to boil the porridge-pot to-morrow morning!"

They all smiled at, and applauded, and, perhaps, secretly a little regretted, Elly's decision. And then they talked of other things; and Mr. Maitland told the children that next Sunday an old minister whom they all knew would be with them, and afterwards probationers were to be sent from Edinburgh to "supply" the Abbotsmuir pulpit. Then instructions had to be given about various matters in connection with the services, which

the manse children fully understood, and felt the importance of.

"Be sure you get the psalms for Robert Smith always beforehand from the minister. And you must explain to whoever is preaching, that the collection is not taken up at the door, but before dismissing the congregation—just before the blessing is pronounced. I think *you* had better take that in hand, Louly."

Then Loulou, her vanity gratified by the recognition of her peculiar trustworthiness, and her wounded feelings soothed by the use of that diminutive of her name which always signified a caress, recovered spirits and good-humour entirely as she promised obedience.

There were several sick people, too, whom the children were to visit, and write their father tidings of when he was gone;—a young man, who was dying of consumption in a little moorland cottage; and an old blind woman, who lived alone and was very poor.

"Go sometimes and read Sarah a chapter, Isabel," said Mr. Maitland. "She will take it very kindly, poor old body."

But Isabel did not receive her charge so cheerfully as Loulou had done. She was nervously, even painfully shy, and the idea of reading aloud to any stranger seemed terrible to her. "Yes," she answered, rather hesitatingly, and that was all she said.

"You had better take her, or send her, some soup when you have any," said mamma. "I'll speak to Susan about it."

They sauntered up and down a little longer, but it was still early when Mr. Maitland proposed that they should go in and have some singing before bidding each other good-night. He had a great though uncultivated taste

for music, and it was always a source of regret to his wife that she had almost none. So the children were all extremely anxious to sing and play well; and though nature had not bestowed on any of them much talent, and they had but few advantages in the way of teaching, they were very eager and painstaking in their attempts. They tried the old psalm-tunes on Sunday nights—French, and St. David's, and Old Hundred—their father liked them best, though he was fond of hymns too; and they used to strike the first note softly on the piano to make sure of starting right, but never played more than that. "For the sake of others" it was better not, Mr. Maitland used to say; he himself had no scruples of conscience about instrumental music. So when the children read about all things being lawful, and yet not all expedient, they invariably thought of piano-playing on Sunday nights; and interpreted the saying about weaker brethren who were not to be offended, as applying to Maggie and Susan in the kitchen, and any of the Abbotsmuir villagers who might hear how the minister's family spent their evenings.

It was always a grief to the young people that papa was inclined so soon for bed, and that mamma—more mindful than they were of his early rising and day of labour—used to encourage this disposition of his. To-night the girls were still quite brisk and talkative when the time came to break up the family party, and Loulou, laughing and grumbling, went off for the candles. She told her father saucily, as she lighted them, that it was too bad of him to go to sleep in the midst of his daughters' sweet singing, and when he came back from Switzerland such a thing was not to be allowed; he must sit up every Sunday night till half-past ten o'clock, without attempting even to have

a nap on the sofa. No other allusion was made to the parting which was to come on the morrow; the little girls kissed their father and bade him good-night as usual, and he answered with the tender baby names of endearment which they loved to hear him use.

Oh happy, happy Sundays in the Abbotsmuir Manse! No wonder I love to dwell on these sweet hours, knowing that their memory will remain with the children in all the years that are to come. Life's storms will beat about the heads which were once so safely sheltered in the warm and peaceful nest, and the parent wings under which they gathered will be spread at last to fly away to other regions. Well will it be for the children then, if they have learned to think of their earthly home as but a pattern of things in the heavens—a true type, although a faint one, of the perfect safety and the deep glad love which, by God's grace, they will find again in the house not made with hands.

When mamma had come to see the girls in their beds, and tucked them in, and kissed them, as she always did, some thoughts of the sorrows of others came vaguely into the minds of the children, who were trying so hard to be brave in the prospect of a four-weeks' separation from their parents.

"What do girls do who have no fathers and mothers at all?" said Isabel. "There *are* such girls, and they *do* live. How can they?"

"Don't speak about it; it's too awful," said Loulou, hastily.

And Elly cried out, with the sound of a great pity in her voice,—"Oh, I think we ought to pray for them!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE DAY OF PARTING.

"Ah, advice may be wise, my darling,
But one always knows it before;
And the reasoning down one's sorrow
Seems to make one suffer the more.

"All to-day I struggled against it,
But that does not make sorrow cease;
And now, dear, it is such a comfort
To be able to cry in peace."

ADELAIDE A. PROCTER.

"GOOD-BYE! Ta ta! Farewell! Bye-bye! *Bon voyage!*"

The manse children, who loved variety, shouted all the words of parting they could think of after the carriage which bore their father and mother away from Abbotsmuir. To the very last they had kept up bravely, and their parents left them all standing outside the church gate smiling; but when the cab turned the corner and was out of sight, the children felt themselves forsaken, and their fortitude utterly gave way. Jim was the first to succumb: as the sound of wheels became fainter and faster, he set his teeth and rushed away towards the courtyard and the outhouses. It was very seldom that any one saw Jim cry; he always tried to hide himself and have his grief out in solitude. Archy was by no means so particular, however; any time and place would do for him to

weep in, and now he began to scream and howl where he stood. Not one of his sisters was mistress enough of her own voice to attempt either soothing or scolding him. Isabel and Elly got out their handkerchiefs and wiped their eyes openly; while even Loulou was obliged to bite her lips and wink hard to keep back her tears.

But when the infection spread to Dolly, and she, who had been excited and merry all morning in thorough enjoyment of all the bustle of packing, now began to realize that mamma was gone, then, indeed, the elder girls felt this was no time to think of their own grief. As the bonny face puckered up, and the first cry broke from the lips of the little one, Isabel fell upon her and tried to comfort her with kisses. Dolly wanted none of them, however, and struggled and screamed in her sister's arms. The noise of lamentation in the manse garden was something frightful, until Loulou, with infinite presence of mind, seized the chief mourner, and dragged her into the house, and towards the press in the dining-room. There Dolly's cries were stilled, as the young housekeeper, with a reckless prodigality which was not at all characteristic, filled the small mouth and hands with sugar. Archy, who had followed to see what would happen, got two good-sized lumps for himself as a bribe to silence. As for Jim, who carried away his grief and troubled no one with it, he got no sugar and no caresses. Such is the way of the world, and so unequally are its rewards distributed!

The younger children being now quieted and consoled, the three elder ones retired to the garden and sat down together on the grass. At such times it was well understood among them what ought to be done, so Isabel began, though in rather a quavering voice, to tell a story. "Well, then. Lady Fitzclarence and the children lived for

a long time alone in the castle, and it was very dull." Here she paused, and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes and lips; Elly cried out, "Oh dear!" in a tone of woe; Loulou turned her back upon her sisters; and there was silence altogether for a while.

"Well then, Isa?" said Elly at last.

"It was rather dull," said Isabel, "very dull. Aimée didn't like embroidery, you know, so she didn't know what to do with herself, for she was never allowed to ride beyond the walls now-a-days. And then, as for Harry—"

Again Isabel stopped and had recourse to her handkerchief, then took up her tale once more. "As for Harry—"

At this point Elly burst out with a sob, but checked herself immediately, and said, in a tone of forced cheerfulness, "Yes? Harry wouldn't like it either, I suppose?"

"No. You see he was a boy, and—;" Isabel groaned deeply.

"Make the siege come quickly," suggested Loulou, after a pause; "I want to hear about that."

Thereupon the story-teller tried to gather up her forces, and began again with some animation. "One morning, at sunrise, as the warders were looking from the walls, they saw an army coming, and knew it must be the Yorkists upon them. And so—"

At any other time the whole three would have been in great excitement at this juncture, but now Loulou and Elly were listening to the tale with as little interest as Isabel showed in telling it. When her voice failed again, it was some time before Elly took the trouble to ask, "What did they do then?"

"I suppose they let the portcullis down," said Isabel, "and then, perhaps, they went and told Lady Fitzclarence. —Oh, I don't know *what* they did!—It's no use! We'll

just spoil the siege if we do it just now. Wait till we're feeling better."

"Tell us something about Miss Martyn's, then," said Loulou, still without looking round.

"Do you really want to know?" asked Isabel, startled into momentary cheerfulness by this most unusual request. "What would you like to hear about?"

"Anything—if it will only keep us from feeling so horribly miserable," was the reply.

"Then I'll tell you what sort of dresses the girls wore on Sunday evenings. You'll like that, Lou."

Isabel commenced her description of the school-girls' garments briskly enough, but her voice soon faltered and failed in her new story as it had done in the one about Lady Fitzclarence. "Anne of Geierstein" was brought out after that, but Sir Walter Scott's powers of entertainment proved in this case to be no greater than her own. Nothing was interesting that afternoon. The book was tossed away in disgust, and the three girls sat in silent desolation on the grass.

"Bring the sugar-bowl, Lou," was the last suggestion. "Isn't there enough to go round?"

For a moment they laughed, and then it seemed as if Elly's little jest had only opened the flood-gates; every restraint of pride and fortitude was broken through, and they all burst into violent weeping. For my part, I think they were right. There was no one now to be vexed by the sight of their distress, and it is undoubtedly true that to the female mind there is nothing so refreshing and invigorating in certain circumstances as a "good cry.' When the Maitlands had finished theirs, they felt much better; but they could not so easily pay all the cost of the self-control and determined cheerfulness they had kept up

before their parents' departure. The reaction of feeling that had set in was too strong to be exhausted in one crying fit. For the whole of the day they were very doleful. Let us draw a veil over the rest of it now, and with respectful tenderness and sympathy leave the children alone in their grief.

The first comfort that came to them was brought by the post next day, in the shape of a letter from their mother, written from Edinburgh to tell the children news of their grandmother and Aunt Annie, and of a box she hoped to send off to Abbotsmuir before she left. That very Tuesday when the letter reached the manse, Mr. and Mrs. Maitland were to go on board the steamer which was to take them from Leith to Rotterdam. They promised to write to their children again as soon as they landed on the foreign shore.

The girls now began to feel themselves of importance as the relations of such great travellers. Maggie and Susan, to whom they read the most of their letter, seemed quite awe-struck at the idea of their master and mistress's temerity in crossing the sea, and venturing into countries where strange tongues were spoken. And Loulou found considerable satisfaction in answering the questions of any Abbotsmuirites anxious to know the whereabouts of their minister, by describing her parents' route to Switzerland in a glibly-given list of names. "From Rotterdam to Cologne by train; then up the Rhine,—Bonn, the Drachenfels, Rolandseck, Coblenz, St. Goar, Bingen, Mainz; then by Basle into Switzerland." The young lady had studied the guide-book with great diligence; and if she did not pronounce all her names exactly as a German would have done, it did not matter in the least, as far as her listeners were concerned.

The children did not, however, recover their usual tone of mind until Thursday evening, when Maggie entered the dining-room just after tea, and announced that the carrier had come and brought something for them. The thing turned out to be a small wooden box, which looked as if it had originally contained tea; but the children had no doubt that this was what their mother had promised to send them, and that its contents would be sufficiently miscellaneous. Isabel sprang from the sofa, where she had been lolling rather lazily; while the little ones, who had got scent of what had happened, came hurrying in from the garden with sounds of great jubilation.

"Oh, quick, quick!" said Isabel, kneeling on the floor in excitement. "Maggie, a knife—a hammer—a scissors! Bring something quick to open this up!—Loulou! Loulou! —Where *is* the girl?"

She tugged and pushed at the cord and nails with weak, eager fingers; but Jim, who knew well enough that it would never open under *her* hands, began to shout with the full power of his very strong lungs. "Loulou! Loul-lou! *A box!* A BAWKS! A BAW-AW-AWKS! And immediately a door upstairs flew open, there was the sound of flying feet on the steps, and another face of delighted excitement was added to the circle. Isabel gladly yielded up her place to her more skilful sister, and sat on the floor a little way off. Loulou would let none of them come too near while she was at her work. "Keep your distance! Out of the way, all of you!" she cried, waving the hammer authoritatively to make a clear space round her.

"But we want to see too," they pleaded.

"You'll see in good time; but keep out of my way."

Then the cord was unknotted, and the end of the

hammer skilfully inserted to push up the lid. "Open Sesame!" screamed Isabel and Elly as it began to move. But when the box was uncovered, all Loulou's authority ceased. She might remonstrate, she might even administer well-directed slaps and pushes, but the unpacking of all these delicious-looking parcels was not to be hers alone. Everybody had a hand in the box; and Archy was the first to seize and hold up a long parcel rolled in tissue paper, which had been carefully and steadily placed on the top. "Yook here! yook here, Dolly!" he shouted, as he uncovered the flaxen wig and staring blue eyes of a wax doll; and the little sister standing behind him flung down her former treasure immediately, and clasped the new one in her arms.

"What will you do with two children, lovey?" asked Loulou, taking advantage of the interest excited by the doll to dispossess Jim of his parcel, and discover it was one of grandmamma's well-known boxes of Edinburgh rock. When he flew at her in indignation, she drove him away by throwing a large india-rubber ball at him. "That's for you boys. This is for us all, to be divided equally.—Keep it safe, Elly." And she thrust the sweetmeats into other hands for safe keeping, and had her own into the box again immediately.—"Isabel, what have you got there?"

Isabel was sitting rather disconsolate, a thick, brown, somewhat slightly-bound book in her lap. The edges were all that was remarkable about it, for they were gilt in one light and red in another. "A new history papa has sent us: he said he would. I'm sure I'll never like it nearly so well as dear Macaulay!"

"Oh, you don't know," said Loulou. "You may read it aloud if it's interesting.—Here's a cake!"

The stragglers, who had fallen away to the other end of the room to inspect doll and book and ball, now came back to admire the cake which Loulou had had time to bring out and unwrap safely. "From granny!" she said, flourishing a scrap of paper. "And Aunt Annie has sent us collars and cuffs.—Isabel, is that the kind the girls liked at Miss Martyn's?"

The box was empty now: indeed it was a wonder to them all how it had ever held so much; and they now began to inspect the contents in a calmer, and more leisurely, but no less delighted manner.

"Dearest child!" said Isabel presently to Dolly, "you're letting your old daughter be trampled under foot. Jim has got his foot on poor Dollibella."

The offending brother hastily jumped aside, and waited in horror-struck expectation for a howl of rage and anguish; but Dolly scarcely cast a glance upon the mutilated form that had been so dear to her ten minutes ago. "'Iss is Dollibella," said she, kissing her new toy. "'At an old ugly sing."

"Cruel, heartless pet!" said Isabel; and Loulou, too, kissed the child with as much eagerness as if she had said a very sweet thing.

"Louly will make the new Dollibella some pretty clothes this very night. We'll put her to bed in the old Dollibella's night-gown."

"'Es! 'es!" said Dolly, dancing with delight.

"I say, Dolly," said Jim, who had recovered from his surprise at the unexpected turn of affairs, and begun to think that it might lead to some fun for himself,—"I say, Dolly, let's burn the old Dollibella."

"'Es!" said she, jumping again.

"We'll make a *bone*-fire in the garden."

DOLLIBELLA'S FUNERAL PILE.

"A martyr! a Joan of Arc!" cried Elly, entering into the spirit of the thing. "We'll roast her at a slow fire."

"Wretches that you are!" cried Loulou. "Wait till we come with you, then, to see that you don't do mischief to yourselves. Now, I've cut a piece of cake for each; and here's the rock.—Elly, will you take these bits to the kitchen?"

Elly, who was generally ready to do anything for anybody, went off, accordingly, to take Maggie and Susan their share of the Edinburgh dainties. It was the custom of the manse children to divide all such mercies with the servants; and it was not at all unusual that, as on this occasion, they should be served the first of all. The two stood at the kitchen window afterwards, and watched the preparations for the bonfire with kindly amusement, as well as some anxiety lest one or other of the print frocks should be set alight. Maggie was very tall and grave, and Susan was little and merry, but they were equally honest and loving; and they had lived in the manse for several years now, and were deeply interested in all its affairs. For the last few days they had been sorry for the children, who had been living in that state of unnatural quietness and goodness often caused by profound melancholy; and now they both rejoiced to see them romping again. So, although Loulou invaded the scullery, and carried off more than one candle-end, and Jim was seen crossing the garden with newly-chopped bits of firewood in his arms, neither Maggie nor Susan felt it necessary to interfere.

After all, it was not much of a blaze which the children managed to kindle in a waste corner of the garden to be Dollibella's funeral pyre, and it needed all the pomp

which imagination could throw around it to make it the least impressive. It *did* burn brightly, for the evening was a quiet one, and Loulou had laid the fire; but with all the candle-ends, and the sticks, and the dried broom, and the old manuscripts of stories which the company could collect, the pile of fuel was but a small one. Such as it was, they made the best of it, however; heaping everything up to burn as slowly as possible, and laying Dollibella (now called the Hindu widow) outstretched flat on the top. Then, as the flames kindled round the helpless form, and her quondam mother shrieked with delight, the children, at Isabel's instigation, all joined hands, and moved round the bonfire with measured steps, chanting improvised rhymes with great vigour, and all chiming in with the savage chorus,—

"Burn, burn!
Roast to a turn!"

It was Isabel's turn first, and she gave out her verse with some hesitation, feeling conscious of its poverty and want of originality:—

"Poor Dollibella's dead and gone.
We burn her up—and we leave her alone."

She was relieved when the last words of her halting line were almost lost amid the powerful shouts of "Burn, burn!"

Loulou, who had had more time for preparation, spoke clearly and jantily, but in the same strain:—

"Once on a time we loved her well,
Now we drop not a tear for Dollibelle."

All.

"Burn, burn!
Roast to a turn!"

Then came Elly, who struck into a bolder vein, and, in impassioned language, apostrophized the doomed Dollibella :—

"Wig of tow, and face of wax!
Hand that—"

But here her muse failed her, and she finished off at last in a very lame fashion, amidst shouts of scoffing laughter:—

"Wig of tow, and face of wax!
Hand that never paid Income-tax!"

"Oh! miserably poor! Shockingly poor!" screamed Isabel and Loulou.

All.

"Burn, burn!
Roast to a turn!"

It was Jim now; and, indeed, he had been preparing his part so busily, that he had had no ears for the other rhymes. With a face of gravity and earnestness suitable to the occasion, and yet a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes that betrayed he felt his poem a success, he repeated this striking couplet, putting distinct emphasis upon every syllable :—

"Poor Dollibel-lo,
Miserable fel-low!"

The heartiness with which the chorus was brought in afterwards certainly meant great applause; so that it was, perhaps, no wonder Archy felt he could not do better than give a little variation of his brother's composition :

"Poor Dollibell-ya,
Mizzry-yable fell-yah!"

But when the refrain followed, it was with something of contempt in its tones this time :—

"Burn, burn,
Roast to a turn!"

"Now, pussy-cat! Now, pet lamb! Now, little rosy-posy!" And Dolly, thus adjured, gave in her contribution to the elegy of her deposed favourite:—

"Dolly, dolly,
Pitty polly!"

"Very good, indeed," said the elder sisters; "Rhyme, if not reason," remarked Elly; "O clever girl!" exclaimed the admiring brothers, all paying their tribute of praise to the small sovereign before they made the air ring again with three-times-three repetition of the cannibal-like chorus of their song.

Poor Dollibella had been melting and wasting away rapidly meanwhile. A waxen head and a cloth body stuffed with bran are fine food for flames. Isabel and Loulou gazed remorsefully at last on the charred and scorched remains, and felt rather ashamed of themselves, as they speculated whether papa and mamma would have thought them silly and brutal, and whether Nero burned dolls as well as tortured flies in the days of his youth. After all, as none of them happened to be in a morbid, or even a sensitive mood just then, any pangs of conscience felt about Dollibella's execution were very slight, and entirely confined to the older ones. Jim and Archy repeated fragments of the funeral poem as they poked with long sticks in the ashes of the bonfire; and Dolly's state of delighted excitement continued to the very last.

"You see a doll is really *nobody*," said Loulou, betrayed for once into the utterance of a platitude for which she would have made merciless game of Isabel. "She was nobody even to Dolly herself: and we've all had some fun. Now for clothes for the new Dollibella."

"*Le roi est mort*," said Elly. "*Vive le roi!*"

"O Elly," exclaimed Isabel, "what an accent! If you were at Miss Martyn's, *how* mademoiselle would shriek out at you to '*prononcer mieux!*'"

"Is she actually silly enough to think that telling people to 'pronounce better' will do any good?" asked Loulou sharply. "I should have thought she would have had the sense to see that saying the words over herself was the only way to teach *them* to do it properly. It seems to me to be very contemptible of her always to be screaming out, '*Prononcez mieux!*'"

"Oh, well, she wasn't clever, compared with Miss Framm or Miss Maria," Isabel confessed. "But she spoke beautiful French. Miss Maria is very particular about her governesses having a good accent; and when you and Elly try to talk French, it sounds quite horrible after mademoiselle's. You say, '*Prononcsy meevo.*' You oughtn't to pronounce these words as if they had *g*'s in them; and I *wish* you would remember that a French *ou* or *eux* is not the same as two English *o*'s."

"Oh, don't begin upon each other's French," pleaded Elly, who had a reasonable horror of the long discussion between her sisters, which was almost sure to follow any attempt on Isabel's part to bring forward the knowledge she had gained at school. And, for once, Isabel and Loulou heeded her words and ceased disputing, while the latter busied herself in unwrapping the new Dollibella from her paper covering and attiring her in the night dress which had belonged to her predecessor.

"Don't melt her with hugging her too close, Bonnie," she advised, when Maggie came, before the ashes of the bonfire were cold, to take the younger children to bed. And Dolly went off with a nod of grave importance, carrying her new namesake with maternal care; the kid arms (dis-

proportionately small compared with the rest of the body) stretched over the little mother's brown holland sleeve, and the flaxen head pillowed on her shoulder, while the wide-open beady eyes of the doll seemed to stare upwards in obstinate protest against the very idea of going to sleep.

"I'm afraid Dollibella's in for a wakeful night," said Elly.

"The excitement of the journey has been too much for her, perhaps," suggested Isabel.

Amidst the laugh that followed, when they were quite sure Dolly was out of hearing, Loulou said, "I wonder if we could club together and get her a doll that shuts its eyes? The worst is, they're apt to go wrong; the machinery is sure to break soon, and if the eyes were to stick shut for ever, it would be a bad business."

"I don't know that," said Elly. "A blind Dollibella would be a variety."

"Well," said Loulou, "I'm going to get some of the print that was left over from Bonnie's own blue frock, and make a new dress for this lady at present."

They all went into the house, and having decided, after some reflection, that the new history had better not be begun until the morrow, they established themselves in the dining-room; Loulou and Elly at the table, to cut and contrive doll's clothes; and Isabel on the sofa, to tell them a tale. The siege of Fitzclarence Castle was begun again, and this time finished successfully; the story going on with unabated vigour until the Yorkists had scaled the walls of the fortress, hung their banner over the battlements, summarily consigned the countess and her children to one of the dungeons, and even taken the trouble to pour boiling pitch about the red rose bushes in her ladyship's garden. The manse children had a recipe for making the

characters in their stories "interesting," the efficacy of which they profoundly believed in—"Put them in uncomfortable positions;" and they certainly practised their favourite precept to-night in the case of the unfortunate Fitzclarences.

The girls retired to bed in great good-humour with each other and satisfaction with their "Family." Loulou even condescended to say that Harry and Aimée were not hackneyed characters, after all; and that she did not wonder Lady Fitzclarence was such a favourite of Queen Margaret's. And as the elder sisters were just dropping into slumber, they were aroused by a gurgling sound from the other bed, resolving itself at last into laughter, which, though rather hysterical, very evidently denoted pleasure.

"What's the matter, Elly?"

The answer came out in broken words, amidst convulsive motions of the bedclothes, and savage butting of the pillows. "Harry!—the dear boy—wanting to fight for his mother and Aimée—I like him!—I like him!"

"Yes. Harry's trying to keep the door was a good touch," said Loulou, rousing up to express her calmer approval.

It was a proud moment for the story-teller, to whom praise came so seldom that it was very precious. The commendation, too, was given by critics who scorned flattery, and whose literary taste was not easily satisfied; for Loulou and Elly, as has been seen before, did not always treat *printed* stories with respect.

Isabel felt that she could not with dignity do more to show her pleasure than turn quietly on her pillow and remark that she too liked Harry; but her heart was beating fast, and her voice was a little unsteady. And after the

sisters who applauded her had gone to sleep, she lay awake, in the sweet semi-darkness of the summer night, and hugged her triumph close, while her fancy followed the fortunes of the Fitzclarences into other scenes, to be revealed to Loulou and Elly on the morrow.

CHAPTER V

A LONG LETTER.

"I wrote it, and I folded it, and I put a seal upon it.
* * * * * *
For the meaning was so plain
That I loved her faithfully!"—*Old Song*

DEAREST MOTHER,—Maggie went to town on Saturday (Loulou will tell you why), and bought this fine, thin, *thin* paper, so that we can write ever so much to you without costing double postage. We were very glad to hear that you and father had crossed safely, and were not very ill at all. I hope that you have got our letter that we wrote you to Coblenz?

We are all getting on very well. Lou is very housekeepy, of course; Elly is very good, no nervousness or anything; and the little ones are behaving nicely. Would you like to know what sort of life your children lead while you and papa are away? The virtuous Louisa rises early to practise, but Isabel and Eleanor think they do well if they appear in the dining-room at breakfast-time, when Isa pours out the tea, and Louly reigns over the porridge. Then we read a chapter, verse about; and, after that, the boys have their lessons with Loulou, and I help Elly with her music. Sweet Bonnie plays with the new Dollibella—in the garden if it is fine, in the dining-room beside us if

it is wet. When the children are gone, we three elder ones settle down together, and read the "Dutch Republic." It is a delightful book, please tell father. I think I like it *almost* as well as dear Macaulay! If there is time before dinner I do my practising then; if not, I do it at some other time. Loulou gets through a great deal of sewing, of course, and Elly does some, but I am always the one to read aloud. After dinner, we dawdle about and do nothing particular till the postman comes, for there is always the chance he will bring something for us, though he so seldom does! Then off we go for a sauntering, sitting-down, gathering-flowery walk, such as we love. We have not been to see Sarah yet, but one day we went over the moor to see the young man papa told us to ask for. He was better, he said, and seemed glad to see us; but he looked very ill, and we could scarcely think of anything to say to him. It was so strange to be with a person so nearly dying! Only we three big ones went, it was too far for the tinies; and we lost our way on the moor coming home, and were very late; and Dandy gave us a great deal of trouble, for he *would* chase rabbits, though we scolded him and whipped him, and carried him a good bit of the road. But generally we are at home again in plenty of time for tea. Afterwards, we play hide-and-seek or some such game with the children until they go to bed, and then have stories and reading aloud again by ourselves. All in bed by daylight! Isn't that a sober, virtuous, regular life? I hope you and father approve?

We got on very well on Sunday. Mr. M'Combie drove here in his gig before forenoon church, and went home again in the evening, so we did not see very much of him. He gave us a very long exposition of the chapter in the morning, and very long psalms and prayers, and a very

long sermon, and the children began to get restless; but Maggie proved our good angel, for she had sweeties in her pocket, which she brought out every now and then; and, finally, she took Dolly in her lap, where the pet lay and slept, and only wakened up when the blessing was being pronounced. I was rather afraid of my class afterwards, but, happily, the psalm they had to learn was about "calling on the Lord in the day of trouble;" so I told them the story about the good old woman who prayed that a wall might be built about her cottage to save her from the soldiers pouring into the town, and how not one disturbed her all night long, though they were in all the other houses round about. The snow had drifted up before her door, they found out in the morning, so that she had got exactly what she asked. Very likely you know the story? Loulou says it's hackneyed, and so perhaps it is, but it was new to my girls; and by the time I had told it in full and heard them repeat all their lessons the hour was over. In the afternoon we took the children out to the garden, with books and pictures, and did the best we could for them, and they were very good. Only in the evening, after church was over, and we girls were alone, we began to feel very dreary—we were tired of reading, and we had no father to talk to—and, I hope you won't disapprove, but we began to try to write Sunday stories, meaning them in earnest of course. We did not succeed very well. It is queer that it is so easy to know what like good moral stories ought to be, and yet so difficult to write them!

Loulou is clamouring for her turn, and I think I have come to about the end of my news.

PART II.

Commend me to Isabel for writing particular letters!

It is rather hard to come second, like me. Elly will find plenty to say, I dare say; but then she has always things of her own. I see Isa has left one little bit for me, however. She says I am to tell you why Maggie went to town on Saturday. The reason was, the butcher did not come at all last week!

But don't be vexed, we managed nicely. We had rice and milk to dinner on Thursday, a gingerbread pudding on Friday, bacon and eggs on Saturday. The children said they wished the man would never come again, for *make-up* dinners were so much the nicest. But Maggie and I thought there might be too much of a good thing; and, besides, we could scarcely put Mr. M'Combie off with a milky or puddingy dinner, so she went to Methwell on Saturday, and, as she was there at any rate, took the train to town. You had said she had better go some day; and sago, and sugar, and some other things were wanted. So we had Sunday's dinner all right; but if the butcher's cart does not come next week, I am going down to Methwell myself I am quite determined—to give the man a piece of my mind. It is too bad that he won't mind his business.

We managed nicely on Sunday. Isa sat at the head of the table, and helped the soup and pudding. Mr. M'Combie carved the mutton, but he was so slow about it that I wished I had taken it in hand. He asked all our names too, and how old Dolly was—he would do the same again if he came here next Sunday. Maggie gave the little ones their dinner in the kitchen, in case they would not behave properly. We wore our white frocks again. Susan ironed them out, and they looked quite well. Dolly's blue print has come back from the washing, and the colour has not gone a bit. We wrote you all about the box and granny's

presents last week. Only I think Isa might have thanked papa more for sending us the "Dutch Republic." I can't say I like everything *she* does, but this *is* nice. At first it was not so very interesting, but we have got over the introduction now. Last night we had a really splendid account of the abdication of the Emperor Charles. We only wish you were here to enjoy it too; but we shall go over it again when you come back. It will quite bear a second reading.

PART III.

There is one thing I should like to know. Is Holland really below the level of the sea, or did the geography books make that up?

I am taking a course of the commentators' lives for my own private reading (one finds them at the beginning of the commentaries). You have no idea how interesting they are, and what queer diseases they died of!

There is another thing I would like to know. Is Dollibella originally a corruption of Dolabella? Isa says No, for she invented the name herself for Dolly's first dolly, and never heard of such a person as Dolabella. But then Isa thought she had invented the name Selina, and was very much astonished when she first found it in a book.

Ah! we *do* love Motley's "Rise of the Dutch Republic." It's a book of books. Isa told you so, I have no doubt, but I could not be bothered reading over her letter to see what she said.

Maggie brought me two twopenny note-books from town; in one of them I am writing a historical novel in Dutch Republican times; in the other I have begun a prophetical or allegorical work which describeth the Future Fortunes of the Maitland Family. Isabel becomes colleague and successor to Miss Maria Martyn; Loulou studies dress-

making in Paris, and afterwards takes up business in Edinburgh, and calls herself Mademoiselle Louise. Most of the windows in Princes Street belong to her shop, and she drives a very flourishing trade, but she is not often spoken about in Miss Martyn and Miss Maitland's school. Jim becomes an eminent minister, Moderator of Assembly, D.D., of course. Archy is the driver of a tramway-car, which goes between Methwell and Abbotsmuir. Oh, it's a very fine tram! It goes up and down twice every day, and has a passenger about twice a week. The little boys on the roadside throw stones as it passes, and Archy leaps down to cuff them. His horses go on of themselves (they're just like machines), and he runs after them, catches them up, and drives on again. Dolly becomes a famous court beauty, and has her picture painted by ever so many grand artists. One of the young princes falls in love with her, and there are great debates in Parliament whether he can marry a commoner or not. They get very tedious, and at last the prince comes stalking in like Oliver Cromwell —but I haven't written nearly so far as that yet. I haven't been able to think of a future fortune good enough for myself. Can you?

We are afraid of making our letter too heavy, in spite of the thin paper, so think it best to request you now to believe us, your loving daughters,

Isabel Maitland.
Louisa Maitland.
Eleanor Maitland.

P.S.—Query: Is there any use in saying that we miss you and father?

I. C. M.
L. K. M.
E. M.

CHAPTER VI.

WEST MAINS.

"We'll talk of sunshine and of song,
And summer days when we were young;
Sweet childish days, that were as long
As twenty days are now."

WORDSWORTH.

ANY one acquainted with the children and their ways might have been able to guess from the preceding letters that things were going well with them; and doubtless Mr. and Mrs. Maitland, in the bright little Swiss town they had reached before this home budget came to them, did so guess, and took great comfort from the thought.

There were three great rocks on which the peace of the Abbotsmuir household was in danger of being wrecked, now that there was no master hand to guide the vessel with practised skill; but it seemed as if these dangers had been all avoided as yet. There had been no disunion between the elder girls, and no rebellion among the younger children, nor had Elly troubled herself and other people with what was generally called her "nervousness." On the contrary, Isabel appeared to be looking on her sister's achievements in housekeeping with a certain placid content; while Loulou was wonderfully sparing of her saucy speeches for a while; the little ones were as happy and

obedient as possible, and Elly was as merry as a bird, and enlivened the whole family with her nonsense.

The bright weather helped them all to be good, and so did Motley's "Rise of the Dutch Republic." There never were lovelier summer days than those first ones after Mr. and Mrs. Maitland went abroad: the children lived in the open air, and Archy especially grew brown and rosy as a berry. And there never was a more delightful book than that thick, dark-covered volume with the edges that were red in one light and gold in another. The children had loved many histories before, but not as they loved this one. Even Jim would leave his play and hang on to the skirts of the reading-party, encamped in the garden or by the water-side; while the girls would give themselves up for hours to the charm of the story. For the "Dutch Republic" was a story thrillingly told, and as the children listened, the scenes of long ago rose up before them; they learned to know the very faces of the actors in that long struggle for liberty; they heard their voices; they felt their joys and sorrows. Isabel soon renounced her claims for the surpassing interest of "dear Macaulay," or the volume of Froude with Queen Mary's execution in it. Neither of them possessed the special fascination of this new history, which lay in the fact that the author was leading them over perfectly unknown ground: the names that so soon became household words had, many of them, never been heard by the children before.

I do not know what freak of fancy it was that first made Elly nickname the excellent and somewhat stolid Maggie, Cardinal Granville, but at any rate the title bore the test of practice better than many a happier soubriquet. The name "stuck," as the children said; and when Susan was heard one day addressing her companion in the kitchen

as "Cardinal," the joy in the dining-room knew no bounds. Very soon all the children had found pet characters in Motley, whose names and titles they proudly bestowed upon themselves. Elly was the first to make a choice, and with rapturous protestations of affection, fixed upon that "most brilliant of cavalry officers," Lamoral d'Egmont, the "bold and rapid hero of St. Quentin." Probably it was the similarity of the Christian name to her own, that made Loulou set her heart upon Count Louis of Nassau, the brave, bright young brother of the Prince of Orange. Isabel was longer over her search for a favourite hero, but at last was happy enough to discover one who suited her romantic ideas in everything, except that there was so little told about him! This was Saint Aldegonde, whose motto was *Repos Ailleurs*. Jim and Archy were well content to take the names of Hoogstraaten and Brederode, from two rollicking nobles who made themselves conspicuous in the early days of the revolt; and Sweet Bonnie was generally addressed now-a-days as the Queen of Spain.

But among the Netherland heroes there was one whose name was esteemed too sacred to be bandied about in idle talk. William the Silent, Christian patriot and martyr, as described in the glowing words of Motley, woke an enthusiastic admiration in the breasts of the children; for in spite of their contempt for everything that they considered "hackneyed," or "sentimental," they were by no means devoid of veneration for what was good and great.

The Maitlands were not, however, entirely left to such amusements as they could find in books or make out of their own fancies; their friends in Abbotsmuir had not forgotten that the minister and his wife were away, and the bairns left alone. A couple of days after the famous letter which I have given in full was written and de

spatched, the elder girls, coming in late from the Moor, found important news awaiting them.

It must be said that the Maitlands, much as they loved the open air, were not at all fond of taking brisk walks. On this occasion they had sauntered about a mile from the manse, and then settled down for the whole afternoon under the shelter of a narrow belt of fir-trees which skirted what was called—*par excellence*—the Moor. A burn, fresh from the mountains, trickled beside the wood, and might be crossed by a somewhat insecure bridge consisting of a couple of rough logs overlaid with turf; beyond this, the children's eyes wandered over a long stretch of heathery country rising at last into heathery hills. But to the Maitland girls this prospect was not dreary but exhilarating, and no other wind seemed to them to have the same bracing freshness as that which came with such a long free sweep across the Moor. They were not the least solitary either, though no human beings but themselves appeared in sight; they had Motley and each other, and were quite content; indeed, the time passed much more rapidly than they had any idea of. Walking slowly home at last, when the sun was no longer bright, they found Maggie at the gate watching for them.

"I thought you were lost," she said with some severity in her tone. "It's past seven o'clock: the others have had their tea two hours ago, nearly."

"Is it so late? I'm glad you didn't keep the children waiting," said Isabel, turning rather wearily towards the house.

"It was splendid on the Moor this afternoon," added Elly. "Such a lot of game as we saw! It was well we left Dandy at home, poor beastie."

"You've missed Mrs. Allen," said Maggie. "She was

here about five o'clock, and sat a while waiting for you. I thought you would be in every minute."

Exclamations of mingled dismay and mortification burst from all the three girls.

"She's brought butter and eggs, and a beautiful bottle of cream," continued Maggie, as she passed on into the kitchen regions; "and she wants you all to tea to-morrow night, if it's fine."

Again the girls exclaimed, but this time it was with satisfaction; and the chorus was swelled by the little boys and Dolly, who came hurrying to meet their elders in the dining-room.

"We're all asked to West Mains! We're all asked to West Mains!"

"And who are 'we'?" asked Loulou, ever ready to put down the juvenile members of the family.

"All of us." "Me!" "And me! And Dolly, and all!"

"Oh, indeed! And who said you were to go?" asked the merciless sister.

The boys declared defiantly that they had been at West Mains before—mamma had taken them herself; and, meanwhile, Isabel had time to think how nice it would be to have her brothers dressed in their best clothes on a week-day, and to take Dolly out to tea for the first time in her life.

"Would it be too far for *la petite reine?*" she asked, veiling the end of her sentence in French, under the delusion that it was thereby rendered indistinct to those whom it concerned the most.

"I don't know," said Loulou meditatively. She, too, had her elder-sisterly pride, and her thoughts about Jim and Archy's new sailor suits and Dolly's charms. "I think she might manage it."

Then Jim grinned knowingly, and Archy turned round with delighted chuckles to his little sister. "Dolly, won't you give me one kyiss, 'cause we're yall gyoing to West Mains?"

"But not unless the day's very, very, *very* fine," said Loulou, and Isabel echoed her words.

However, the next day turned out as fine as heart could wish; the sisters' desires to take Dolly had strengthened; Maggie made no objection to their plans; and the whole family were dressed in their freshest and coolest garments, and set off on their walk to the farm early in the afternoon. The children proceeded through the village in very orderly fashion, pleasantly conscious of their nice clothes, and exchanging greetings, chiefly in the way of remarks about the weather, with any of the inhabitants whom they chanced to meet.

"I do like the young Rays," said Loulou, as they passed a neat cottage, whose little bit of garden was all ablaze with bright flowers.

"They'll get the prizes at the flower-show again this year," observed Jim.

"But that's not why I like them," said Loulou with twinkling eyes. "It's because they're such polite young men. I met them last spring when it was pouring rain in bucketfuls, and I said, 'Fine day.' They all looked rather astonished; but they answered, 'Yes.'"

"Did you do it on purpose, Loulou?"

"Not I, of course. I didn't notice what I was saying." Loulou was amused at her own story; but nevertheless told it with some pride, as if she thought the young Rays' excess of courtesy was only the proper respect which should be paid to their minister's daughter.

Elly, however, did not look at the matter in this light.

Never was a child more conscientiously truthful than she, and when she was suffering from an attack of nervousness her scruples often caused her acute agony. This was not the case just now, to be sure; nevertheless, she could not let Loulou's tale pass without remonstrance.

"Oh, don't you think you should go and explain?" she said anxiously. "Shouldn't you go to Mrs. Ray's just now, and tell her about it, and say that you didn't really mean to tell a lie, and perhaps they didn't, either?"

"Oh, nonsense!" said Loulou impatiently. "Of course nobody meant it; it was a mistake, a ridiculous slip of the tongue with everybody. Sometimes, child, you seem as if you couldn't see a joke."

"But perhaps they might *think* that *you* thought it was a fine day," persisted Elly.

"Think that I thought!" repeated Loulou in mockery. "The Rays are not so silly as you. Don't suppose it."

"Elly, dearie," said Isabel more soothingly, "I'm sure mamma would say there was no lie; and nobody could have been in the least deceived. If the Rays thought about it at all, they must have seen how it was: they would know, of course, that Loulou spoke just as they did—quite mechanically."

I scarcely think that Loulou felt altogether pleased with the idea that her polite young friends had spoken quite mechanically, or that Elly was satisfied without being sure that the Rays *had* considered the matter, and come to a right understanding about it. But the former was wise enough to see that if the discussion was continued, all Elly's peace of mind during the walk would be destroyed, and her sisters' comfort materially impaired; while the latter probably reflected that the question did not concern her chiefly, and that she had done her duty when she

declared her opinion about it. Had it been Elly herself who remembered remarking that it was a fine day while it was raining, nothing would have prevented her paying the Rays a visit there and then for the purpose of making apologies and explanations. As it was, her face remained troubled for a time, and her sisters watched her anxiously; but after a little she brightened up, and went off for a scamper with the boys and Dandy.

"After all," said Isabel then, "it's very silly always to speak about the weather to people that we meet. Why shouldn't we say, 'How do you do, so-and-so?'"

"Because then we might have to stand still ever so long and hear about their ailments. That would take up a great deal more time."

"Well, we aren't generally in a hurry."

"But then, perhaps, Elly would think it deceitful to ask people how they are unless we're just longing to know," said Loulou laughing.

"*You* would always want to know, you're such a curious creature. If Elly got nervous about it, we might make you do it always."

"No, thank you. I'm going to keep to 'Fine day,' 'Wet day,' 'Blowy day' ('Blowy day' is what we've to say oftenest). You can begin with your 'How do you do's?' Isa, if Elly will let you; and then we'll see how the plan works." Loulou laughed rather provokingly, for well she knew that Isabel was much fonder of making novel propositions than of carrying them out. But just then, Elly, who had become alive to the fact that they had left the village behind them, and were walking on a quiet road, perfectly suitable for the enjoyment of a story, came scampering back to her sisters.

"Well, Isa?" said she. "Well, Saint Aldegonde! Harry

was just being taken to London, to be bred a page to King Edward."

The children had turned their backs upon the moors, and were walking along a smooth and well-kept road, lined on each side by young oaks, which were only beautiful as yet in their promise of what was to come, for years must pass before they spread out and joined their branches to form a canopy overhead. On each side lay cultivated fields, and, to the right, and far away in the valley, the county town could be distinctly seen, the smoke above it glorified into an ethereal haze. Behind it, the view was bounded by a long range of green hills with softly rounded outlines and delicate lights and shadows. But the children saw none of these things as they tramped along cheerily, for they were following in imagination the long ride of Harry Fitzclarence, a stanch Lancastrian of some ten summers, who was being carried off in captivity to the court of King Edward. Could there be a dearer boy, or a more uncomfortable position? The Maitlands certainly thought not, and heaped misfortune after misfortune on his youthful head with ever-increasing affection.

The story went on without interruption until they had reached a spot about a couple of miles from home, where the road divided into two, and the whole party made a halt for a minute to kiss Dolly, and congratulate her upon having passed the limits of all her previous walks. The country in front of them now was richly wooded, not with fir-trees, such as wreathed the Castle of Abbotsmuir in dark and changeless green, but with oaks and beeches, which, lovely as they were in their summer brightness, would be lovelier still in the varied hues of the autumn-time. The road to the right led up to a little old church and churchyard; a favourite resort of the children, who would often climb the

low wall, and wander among the mossy tomb-stones, listening wistfully to the sound of the wind in the long grass about the graves, and the gleeful song of the birds among the shady branches overhead. But to-day they turned to the left, and had presently to pass the door of a roadside farm, where the "minister's bairns" were not allowed to go by unchallenged. The farmer came from the barn-yard, and his wife from the kitchen, to ask for Mr. and Mrs. Maitland, and press the young people to come in and refresh themselves with milk and scones. Well knowing that, according to the usages of society in Abbotsmuir, it was almost an insult to refuse to "taste" in any house they were invited to do so, it was very hard for the children to persist in declining these hospitable offers; but they had learned by experience that they needed all their appetites for what they were expected to do in the way of eating at West Mains. Loulou was wonderfully successful in combining firmness with extreme politeness in her thanks and excuses, and Dolly did much to smooth away any offence by the sweetness of her looks and ways. These two were left to do almost all the talking; for Isabel and Elly, annoyed at being dragged out of their story, stood impatiently behind, while Loulou showed off her little sister and the new doll, whose high-sounding name the owner actually condescended to explain.

"She's called after she's aunt and she's mother," she said, then held up her own face for farewell kisses, and set off again to trudge cheerily beside her sisters to West Mains, leaving golden opinions behind her in the roadside farm.

A few minutes' longer walk through the woods brought the children to the stile by which they could cross into one of Mr. Allen's fields, and reach their destination by a short

cut. And now the girls felt their own journey was so nearly done, that it was scarcely worth while to continue "Harry's;" so they amused themselves and the little ones by talking over the pleasures to be enjoyed at West Mains, as they walked along the green and well-wooded park, rejoicing in the softness of the grass under their feet, and the shadow of the trees and the high stone wall above them.

They must have been very much occupied with their own concerns before they could forget Dandy; but so it was, until they were startled by a sudden and horrible thunder of hoofs, and perceived their pet hurrying to them from the other end of the field, pursued by a whole army of infuriated cattle. It was an awful moment. While Dandy was still far away from their help, one long-horned monster got close upon him; its head was down, and the terrified children were just expecting to see the poor little dog tossed into the air, when something—probably it was the courage of despair—made Dandy turn round and bark. Astonished at the sound, his pursuer recoiled. Dandy, perceiving his advantage, barked again and again; and then, with a desperate rush, made good his escape to the friends who were hastening to meet him.

Not one of the children had the least doubt what was to be done. Even Isabel, who feared the most stolid-looking cow that ever munched grass, would never have thought of leaving Dandy to his fate and trusting to his own common sense to rescue him from the danger he had run into. She, as the eldest, took the cowering creature in her arms, and covered him with her dress; while the others closed round her as a guard,—all except Jim, who climbed the wall nimbly, to see if safety could be found in the next field, but dropped down again in disappointment, saying,

"There's cows there too, quite close. And I think there's a bull." It was quite evident that nothing remained for them but to make the best of the situation they were in.

"Isabel, walk nearest the dike," said Loulou, flourishing her umbrella. "Take Dolly with you; we'll keep on the outside. Don't let us run, whatever we do."

Elly and the boys armed themselves with such sticks as they could find lying about, and the little band looked as brave as they could, and marched along steadily. The cows approached them slowly, seeming moved rather by curiosity than anger now; but, oh, what terrible horns some of them had! Elly could not help shrieking sometimes, and then Loulou and Jim would make a rush at the enemy with much whooping and flourishing of weapons. The cows always fell back then for a yard or two, and stood still; but they were sure to follow whenever the children walked on. Loulou dealt some effective blows with her umbrella, and astonished more than one cow by opening it suddenly under its nose; but the sticks which the other children had picked up were sadly useless and rotten, and fell in pieces in their hands as they waved them.

"I wish we all had umbrellas!" said Jim more than once.

"Didn't I tell you we would need them?" Loulou answered, feeling eager even then to prove her own wisdom, and apparently oblivious of the fact that it was rain she had prophesied, and not attacks from cows.

In the midst of all the terror, they heard Archy whispering to Dolly, "Bonnie, say you's pyayers; I must fyight. Ask ye good Lord to take kyare of Dandy."

"'Es, and Dollibella too," said she, as she trotted bravely on between the dike and Isabel, holding her doll in one hand and her sister's dress in the other.

I have no doubt the elder children also put up their petitions, though they did not own it: it was nervous work walking along with those disapproving faces so very close behind them. The way across the broad park seemed almost interminable; and exciting as it was, there was a horrible monotony about these numerous stoppages to act on the defensive, always followed by the same result. But at last the knoll which hid the farm from their view was crossed; the outsiders made one more bold rush on the advancing cows, then, hastily profiting by the discomfiture of the foe, the children all reached the gate by a sudden scamper. Dolly and Dandy were thrust through it first, the others following helter-skelter. Loulou and Jim hastily closed the barrier, and all were safe in the farm-yard.

Hot and out of breath, they paused to realize their escape, and jeer at the cows, which gazed after them with their heads over the gate. The Maitlands were inclined to think themselves very heroical, and it was with mutual compliments and congratulations that they passed at last through the farm-yard, and behind the long, old-fashioned house, to a garden gate at the side. West Mains was the largest and most prosperous farm in the neighbourhood. Everything about it denoted the fact, but there was nothing done for show; and the children, judging all farms by this home of their dearest and oldest friends, were unmerciful in their condemnation of trim new gardens, and houses in the villa style.

Mrs. Allen met them just inside the gate, and clasped one after the other in a loving embrace, and rejoiced much over Dolly, who had come to visit her for the first time. Then she led them upstairs, to an old-fashioned, rather dark, but most comfortable chamber, where the children

laid their hats on the great, heavily-curtained bed, talking all the time about their walk, and the danger they had been in from the cows. Mrs. Allen gave them plenty of interest and sympathy, and was horrified and saddened to hear of the conduct of the "beasts." Mr. Allen, on the contrary, seemed rather amused at the story, when they repeated it to him again in the parlour over their tea.

I am afraid it is quite beyond my powers adequately to describe the glories of a tea at West Mains. Mrs. Allen's dainties were famous, not only in the Abbotsmuir Manse, but at Miss Martyn's school in Edinburgh, where Isabel used to make her companions' mouths water, by telling of them in her bed-room at night. Such scones were never known anywhere else. Whether rightly or wrongly, they were believed to be of Mrs. Allen's own invention, as well as her own manufacture. They were baked with cream, rolled thin, and cut into large, three-cornered pieces; and with deliciously fresh butter spread thickly upon them, and surmounted again by transparent jelly, it was certain that nothing else ever tasted so good. No wonder that the plate of baker's biscuits and shortbread, which Mrs. Allen never failed to provide, and considered preferable to the scones, was entirely neglected by the children. Mrs. Allen's tea, too, was so good,—much stronger than mamma gave even to Isabel and Loulou; too strong it would have been, indeed, but for the abundance of rich cream which pleasantly mellowed its taste. And how busy the kind couple were in pressing their older guests to help themselves, and preparing "pieces" for the little ones, while their faces fairly beamed with kindness towards the minister's bairns!

Loulou was Mr. Allen's favourite among the girls, because she was not a bit afraid of him, but would speak up briskly on any subject he chose to talk about. From

her he always got answers to his grumbling about the weather and the game laws, with which—more than half in good-humour—he carried on the table-talk after the adventure with the cows had been discussed. His wife reproved him mildly, and exhorted him to contentment. She herself showed him the example, for she had a happy, kindly word for almost everything; but the weather is well known never to suit farmers, and the strict preservation of the game was a standing grievance to the Abbotsmuir tenants, though West Mains suffered less than many other parts of the property.

"If you were nearer the muirs, John Allen, you might have something to speak about," said Mrs. Allen, who always called her husband by his full name when she wanted to be particularly impressive.

Then Miss Loulou delivered her opinion. "I'm a Conservative," said she, "and I think landlords have rights as well as tenants. All that bother about the game is a mere case of bargain between them. There are the people at Gairnside now, who make such a work about their crops being eaten up. They knew what they were coming to when they took the farm. They knew there were rabbits and hares about, and they chose to settle down in the midst of them. If they did the same in a country overrun with lions and tigers, they would have no right to complain afterwards."

The young lady gave forth her sentiments with the utmost assurance, holding her chin high, and looking as pert as possible; while Mr. Allen, too much amused at her manner to heed much else, was quite overcome by laughter. But Elly, who had been listening with attention, now crooked two fingers of each hand, and held them up in the air at a little distance from each other, to

represent marks of quotation. The sign was not likely to be intelligible to any but the Maitlands, so Elly took care to add an explanation in an aside to Mrs. Allen, which was, however, distinctly audible all round the table. "That's not her own. It's all Uncle James's."

"Well," said Loulou, determined not to be disconcerted, "Uncle James is a Conservative, and so am I."

"Hoots, toots," said Mr. Allen, still laughing; "that's a bad account to give of you both."

"Not at all. I'm not ashamed of my colours."

"Papa is a Liberal," said Isabel with crimson cheeks and a trembling voice. "I *think* he's a Liberal, but he doesn't often speak of these things. As for us, we know nothing about them."

The elder sister was pained and shocked in the extreme by the forward conduct of the younger. That a girl of Loulou's years should have any ideas at all about politics was bad enough; that these ideas should be different from her father's was worse still; but the height of all presumption seemed to be reached in this public and audacious avowal of her sentiments. Isabel thought of Loulou's future, and she shuddered. She imagined the time when she, too, would enter that famous school where Isabel had had the advantage of being a pupil; and she fancied Loulou at Miss Martyn's tea-table holding her chin high in the air, and informing the assembled company that she was a Conservative, and not ashamed of her colours. A horrible thought, but one that Isabel need scarcely have entertained; for Loulou, who did not by any means lack discrimination, was not at all likely to talk to Miss Maria Martyn as she did to Mr. Allen of West Mains.

"We know nothing about these things," repeated Isabel in dismay.

"Speak for yourself," said Loulou, then. "You say you know nothing about it; I say I'm a Conservative."

"Well, I suppose that's what the young laird will be, like his fathers before him," said Mrs. Allen.

"Let us all hope he'll be what he ought to be," observed Elly; "and we may each have our own ideas about that. Now, I should like him to give Dandy a passport to hunt on the moors, and then we wouldn't be afraid of his getting shot. Wouldn't we defy the gamekeepers then, Jim? That would make Mr. Mackenzie of Abbotsmuir a *sensible*, *merciful* man; and that's what I hope he'll be. Now go on, some one."

Elly would fain have made the matter into a sort of round game; but when Mrs. Allen had expressed her hope that the young laird would be *good*, there did not seem much else left to wish for in the future character of Hugh Mackenzie, who was then a delicate boy at an English school. The political conversation was not resumed, however; and perhaps Loulou felt a little hurt that Mr. Allen did not think her worth arguing with, for she looked rather sullen all the rest of tea.

In the garden, afterwards, when they were standing a little apart from the others, Isabel took the opportunity to whisper hastily, "My cheeks are tingling yet."

"What for?" asked Loulou; and then, without waiting for an answer, she went on in a tone of suppressed passion, "That's the way you always do, always—always! You never will talk to people, and Elly only does it when she likes. You leave it all to me to do, and then you fall out on me afterwards. It's too bad, and I won't bear it!"

Isabel fell back a little in astonishment; this was certainly not the way she had expected her rebuke to be taken. That Loulou should have laughed and scoffed

would have seemed to her characteristic enough, although very provoking; but she could not understand this sudden outburst of half-sobbing passion. It would have been well had it occurred to her that there might be some truth in her sister's bitter complaints; but, after a moment's reflection, she came to the conclusion that Loulou's temper was worse than she had ever supposed. For a little she kept silence, with a resigned persistency that was probably more provoking than any words could have been, and then she sighed long and heavily. Loulou darted her an angry look, in answer to which Isabel sighed again. The two girls were standing together on one of the sanded, box-bordered paths of the pleasant old-fashioned garden; bees buzzed past them busily, on their way to and from the hives that were close beside; fruit-laden gooseberry bushes grew thick around them; and a little way off Elly and Dolly were chattering to Mrs. Allen, who was filling their hands with flowers; great, sweet cabbage-roses, velvety pansies, and forget-me-nots blue as the sky. But Isabel and Loulou were both in spirit on the grass beside the burn, and the scene before their eyes seemed to have changed into the one where their parents' visit to Switzerland was first proposed. Once more Isabel imagined she saw the look of determined indifference on Loulou's face, and heard the contemptuous click of her knitting-needles while Loulou remembered with bitterness how Isabel had gathered the little ones round her and persuaded them, with eager words and caresses, to agree to her plans, leaving her on the other side of the burn, unappealed to, and apparently unnoticed.

"Come here, you two, and get some flowers," Elly called out to them presently; "the gooseberries aren't ready yet."

And then, as Mrs. Allen was giving hospitable invita-

tions for them all to return in a fortnight's time, when the fruit would be ripe, the two sisters took up their present grudges and grievances and laid them safely away beside those other ones which had been stored now for weeks. It was wonderful how well they all fitted together, and how fresh and large the old troubles seemed when they looked at them again.

Nobody had noticed the by-play between the girls, and they rejoined the others, and thanked Mrs. Allen with plenty of outward cheerfulness. "It's a long time since we were here last," said Loulou; "not since Elly named the calves in April."

"Oh, Mrs. Allen!" cried Elly, "don't tell me—*pray* don't—that they were my own name-sons and name-daughters who chased us in the park!"

But Mrs. Allen laughed heartily at the idea of the spring calves having grown into the large and horned creatures that had alarmed the children so much in the afternoon.

"Where are they all, then? Where's Violet, and where's Pharaoh?"

"Pharaoh's in the park beside the farm-road. When you're driving home to night you'll see him, Elly. I can't mind all your names, my dear, but I always mind *him*."

"No wonder you don't remember all the names," said Loulou, "there were so many of them. It is very hard, too, to get much variety in their names when there are such a lot to do."

"I'm glad you've kept an eye on Pharaoh, though," said Elly; "there was something very fine about him—quite regal. But if I had a calf to name now, I would call it Harry."

This allusion to their favourite caused considerable dismay, for the existence of the Families was a secret which

was jealously guarded by the three girls. Isabel twitched Elly's dress and made a warning grimace; while Loulou, though not particularly willing to please her eldest sister just then, hastened to prevent Mrs. Allen having the opportunity of asking the reason for Elly's choice.

"I'd call one Count Louis," said she, "and one the Jungfrau. That's the great white mountain papa and mamma see every day just now."

So the conversation wandered away to their parents' travels; and as they eagerly told of the letters they had received, Isabel and Loulou drifted back insensibly into their ordinary relations with each other; for how could they be cross when they were repeating with eager voices and shining eyes what their father had told them of a day spent in busy Rotterdam, with its shady streets and canals, and its quaint windmills? To the young admirers of the "Dutch Republic," Holland was almost a sacred country. It seemed too good to be true that their parents had set foot on the soil which had once been trodden by their heroes. The Rhineland, with its vineyards and castles, was comparatively uninteresting, and even Isabel's fairy realm of everlasting snow had now lost much of its charm. But Mrs. Allen was interested to hear all they could tell of the places where her minister had been, so Loulou brought out her string of names and her guide-book knowledge, and the talk went on briskly till the little boys, who had meanwhile been inspecting the farm with their host, came running back to say that Mr. Allen was getting boards put into the cart for seats, and they were all to drive home. Isabel and Loulou thought it necessary to make some polite objections, but were very glad to have them overruled, for though Dolly was skipping briskly about the garden showing Dollibella the flowers, they could

not but think that the walk home again would be rather a trial for her small legs.

"Trouble! Don't you speak about such a thing, my dear," said Mrs. Allen, laying her hand affectionately on Isabel's shoulder. "The dog-cart wouldn't hold you all; but you'll be real comfortable in the cart. I would never let that dear lamb walk all the way back. Now, just you come in and have a drink of milk before you go."

They all obeyed willingly enough, for Mrs. Allen's milk was well known to be what other people would have called cream.

"Elly," whispered Jim, as they were returning to the parlour, "her real cream must be like butter!"

Loulou gave him a knock on the back, and asked who "she" was; but Elly laughed good-naturedly, and repeated the remark to Mrs. Allen afterwards when the jug and glasses appeared. The good lady would not, however, allow that the frothy beverage which she poured out so freely was anything better than "good milk." Once and again she filled the tumblers—admitting no refusals—before she allowed her visitors to prepare for their departure. The cart was in waiting at the back of the house, and Mr. Allen lifted all the children into it—even Isabel and Loulou, who were rather shamefaced, but could not help acknowledging that it was the best way of mounting. The boards, cushioned with shawls, made very comfortable seats, but Jim insisted on going in front beside the driver, rather to the alarm of his sisters, who thought it very likely he might drop off. Dolly was the last to be hoisted up; Mrs. Allen embraced her long and tenderly, and asked if she would come to see her again.

"'Es, vely soon," said the little queen, condescendingly 'I'll bring Dollibella back; she's enjoyed she's self."

Meanwhile, Dandy, which had had his share of scones and milk, and passed a very pleasant evening, was watching his friends with considerable perplexity as they were raised one after another beyond his reach. He barked anxiously more than once, and Isabel was of opinion he should be taken up beside them; but when the cart began to move he apparently came to a right understanding of the matter, and trotted after it contentedly as it jogged along the farm-road. As Mrs. Allen had foretold, Elly saw her calves. She had, indeed, no doubt that her eyes at some moment rested upon Pharaoh, but, alas! she could not recognize him.

The drive home was a triumphal progress. The children in the cottages they passed came out to stare at them; and Jim, Archy, and even Elly waved their hats and cheered. Isabel and Loulou, though amused, were rather scandalized, and solemnly enjoined silence and dignity as they drew near the village; but when Loulou's friends, the young Rays, were seen standing at their door with good-humoured grins on their faces, it was impossible to restrain the boys' wild shout of greeting.

Maggie came to the manse gate and helped them to get down, which was not a very difficult business after all; but while the little ones clung to her, and told their pleasures, Isabel stood where she had alighted, and looked anxiously at the carter. Not till he had slowly turned the horse and was already on his homeward way did she follow Loulou, who had separated from the other children and gone into the manse by the front door.

"Oughtn't the man to have been thanked for driving us?" asked Isabel. "I think he's one of papa's congregation too."

"Yes, he is," said Loulou, calmly taking off her

hat. "He must think us very rude. I know him quite well."

"O Loulou! why didn't you say something to him then?"

"It might have made your cheeks tingle," said Loulou, bitterly.

Isabel sighed once more; and the two girls went upstairs in silence. It was well there was no need for writing to Interlachen that night, for, in spite of all the pleasures of West Mains, they felt they could not now declare, with the same cheerful confidence as they had done before, that all was going well with them. But it was this very thought which brought the sisters back into something of a better mind. They had resolved to do their best to keep things right while their parents were away, and there was no doubt things would be very far wrong if there was dispeace between the eldest daughters of the family.

"You *might* have thanked the man, when you know how stupid I am about talking to people," said Isabel. "But, Loulou, don't let us two quarrel when papa and mamma are away."

"Very well," said Loulou, sulkily; "I'm sure I don't want to quarrel."

"Then," said Isabel, trying hard to speak graciously, "let us say no more about the matter."

"Very well," said Loulou, again.

And the girls kept to their bargain. But saying nothing more about a matter is, unfortunately, not always the same as forgetting it—or forgiving it either.

CHAPTER VII.

ELLY IN TROUBLE.

"Oh! say not, dream not, heavenly notes
To childish ears are vain;
That the young mind at random floats,
And cannot reach the strain."

KEBLE.

ISABEL was awakened next morning by the breakfast-bell, and jumping up hastily, found herself alone in the room. Dismayed and indignant, she went through her dressing with more haste than tidiness, and entered the dining room eager to remonstrate with her sisters for not rousing her.

"You *might* have called me, some of you," she said reproachfully, as she took her seat at the head of the table. "It wouldn't have been very much trouble."

"Maggie called you at half-past seven," said Loulou. "Will you please give me some tea?"

"Wait a minute then," was the peevish answer. "Can you give me a pin to fasten my collar? I never heard Maggie, or if I did, it was through my sleep. Oh, I'm so sleepy yet! I feel as if I hadn't got half enough of it!"

"Your hair's coming down," observed Loulou.

"I know; I can't help it; I hadn't hair-pins enough."

"Why didn't you tell Maggie to get some while she was in town?" said Elly; adding immediately afterwards

in a lower tone, and without looking at any one, "I beg your pardon."

"I forgot," said Isabel.—"There's your tea, Loulou.—I quite forgot about several things I wanted when Maggie went to town."

"That's a pity," said Elly, in her ordinary voice; then, a moment after, she repeated under her breath and very rapidly, "Beg pardon, beg pardon."

This singular conduct on the part of her little sister caused Isabel to look at her more attentively, and she saw that a great change had come over the bright, laughing child of yesterday. Elly's eyes were heavy, her mouth twitched pathetically, and all her motions were expressive of the deepest dejection. Every now and then, as if with a great effort, she seemed to drag herself from her gloomy thoughts and try to attend to what was going on around her; but presently she would start as if something had stung her, throw up her arms with a look of anguish, and mutter apologies hard and fast. Isabel was considerably alarmed at the sight of these unmistakable symptoms of a bad attack of nervousness, and turned a glance of inquiry towards Loulou, which was answered by a grimace and shrug, signifying that she also was aware of what was going on, but felt powerless to stop it. It was generally considered best on these occasions to take no notice of Elly as long as possible, so Isabel tried to get up some general conversation about last night's experiences. But in the midst of the boys' most animated descriptions of what Mr. Allen had shown them, and Dolly's sweetest prattle about the bees and flowers, Elly's groans and whispers were distinctly audible.

"What are you doing that for?" said Jim at last, turning to her with a broad grin of amusement.

"Oh, never mind! never mind!" said she; "go on about the turkeys. Beg pardon, beg pardon, beg pardon."

"Run into the garden, you boys, and take Dolly with you," said Isabel, hastily then. "Go and see if Dandy is none the worse of his last night's dissipation."

This suggestion proved, as it was meant to do, an incentive to obedience. The three went off; but Jim popped his head in at the dining-room door again for a moment, to call out scoffingly—

"Beg pardon, Elly! beg pardon!"

At this insult Elly only groaned.

"Now they're gone, Elly; tell us what's the matter with you."

"Oh, I'm so miserable!" she said. "I wish mamma were at home. And oh, I beg your pardon! I beg your pardon!"

"But why do you always say that?"

"Oh me! there are so many times in my life that I haven't said it when I ought to—"

"That you're trying to make up for them now?" said Loulou, scarcely able to speak for laughing.

But not the shadow of a smile crossed Elly's face; and her sisters' hearts sank within them, for they knew that she must be very nervous indeed when she had lost all sense of humour.

"Yes, that's it," said she; and then she went on pattering over her apologies as rapidly and mechanically as if she were a Roman Catholic telling her beads.

Loulou ceased laughing, and attempted to be severely impressive. "Elly, you're not a lunatic; be so kind as not to behave like one."

Elly shivered, sobbed, and begged pardon.

Isabel thought a little inspiriting kindliness might have

a good effect; and sitting down beside the poor child, who had begun to rock herself backwards and forwards in her misery, she patted her on the back, and said cheerfully, "Come now, Elly, be happy! Be happy, dear!"

Elly's face did not clear in the least, nor did she stop swaying; but instead of apologizing, she began to croon over to herself—"Be happy, be happy; Isa says, Be happy."

Then Loulou, in utter exasperation, flung out of the room, declaring that the whole morning was not to be wasted between Isabel's laziness and Elly's nonsense, and that she was going to bring the boys in to their lessons.

Isabel spent some more time in unavailing attempts to comfort her little sister, remembering how patient and tender her mother always was with Elly in these moods. An appeal to her conscience roused her at last, but seemed to make matters little better; for though she went to the piano immediately when Isabel represented to her that it was her duty to do her music as usual, she was as miserable there as when rocking herself on the sofa. With tear-dimmed eyes and trembling fingers she went through her practising; stumbling and making mistakes in her best-known pieces, then insisting on going back, and back again over them, though she got on worse each time. Isabel soon became nearly as nervous as her pupil over the dreary work: her voice grew querulous and tearful, while poor Elly herself counted loudly, and begged pardon between the numbers. The little boys neglected their own lessons to mock and laugh at the inharmonious noise; whereupon Loulou scolded violently, and at last was provoked to box Archy's ears. He retaliated by pinching her with all his might; but after a short struggle, had to yield to her superior strength and skill, and submit to being dragged

off and locked up in the study, from whence he filled the whole house with screams. It was a miserable morning.

At last it was over: the piano shut, lessons done, Loulou's prisoner released. Then Isabel, believing Motley a cure for all troubles, produced the book joyfully, and prepared to read aloud. Elly, however, most unexpectedly demurred.

"I don't think I ought to listen to-day; I feel I oughtn't to be amusing myself. I think I ought to go away by myself, and think whether there aren't some other things I have done wrong that might be put right now."

"Are you sure you've said all the 'Thank you's' you ought to have said?" asked Loulou, jibingly.

Whereupon Elly burst out weeping again. "It's dreadful, dreadful! Oh, if mamma were only here!"

"I'm mamma when mamma's away," said Isabel, putting her arm round her tenderly.

The hindrance to the much longed-for reading had been a sore trial to Isabel's temper, but she had had time to get over it. I wish I could say that it was compassion for Elly, and nothing more, that had helped her to overcome her annoyance; but I am afraid there was also some desire to oppose Loulou, who was evidently inclined to be sarcastic and severe. It is, however, doubtful whether Isabel herself was at all conscious of the mixture of her motives, or even of the half-defiant glance she cast at Loulou as she embraced her little sister.

"Fancy mamma with her hair tumbling down, and her collar unpinned!" remarked Loulou.

"But it isn't mammy's collar or her hair that you want—is it, dearie?" said Isabel, with a tone of reproach in her voice that was not meant for Elly. "Come into the garden with me, and tell me all about it, my poor child."

There had been rain in the early morning, and the wind from the hills blew with a damp freshness on the uncovered heads of the little girls, tossing about Elly's loose hair, and very soon depriving Isabel's plaits of the very faintest pretension to tidiness, as they walked slowly up and down the garden paths with their arms linked together. Loulou had truly said that the days were generally "blowy" at Abbotsmuir. Once out in the cool air, Isabel felt her own dull and sleepy feelings pass away, and could not but hope that Elly's miseries would soon do the same: for it was well known that her attacks of "nervousness" could generally be traced to physical causes; and there was little doubt that her depression this morning, like Isabel's own weariness, was the consequence of last night's excitement and exertion. But she knew there was not the least use in saying that to Elly now; and the child's voice was as doleful as ever when she again took up her complaint.

"I'm so miserable, Isabel, I don't know what to do. Oh, it's an awful thing to wake up in the morning and feel everything wrong; and when one can think of nothing but things one *ought* to have done, and one hasn't done! Even though one says hundreds of 'Beg pardons,' how can one be sure one has said enough for all the times one has walked in front of people, or said 'What?' when one didn't hear them? Then you heard what Loulou said about 'Thank you.' Perhaps that will be the next thing to be attended to. Oh, I am very miserable! I almost think this is worse than when I was afraid of people knocking the backs of their ears."

Isabel listened to this speech with attentive gravity, and made no criticism on the painful repetition of the most inconvenient of English pronouns; well knowing that when Elly was nervous she always spoke of herself as

"*one*." But against the last observation of all, the elder sister recorded a mental protest. Whatever the present misery might be to the sufferer herself, it was far less trying for other people than when the panic had been about deadly blows which might be received accidentally at any time. Then Elly had believed it to be her mission in life to lock up, or put safely away, all such things as might prove dangerous to the skulls of her friends; and her ideas on that subject were very large, and included everything which had knobs or corners. For several days the household had been put to inconvenience; and the girls had often lost their tempers in seeking for their possessions, which had been hidden away by Elly's concern for their lives.

"Oh, I'm so miserable!" she repeated now. "I try not to think of things; but I can't help it—something makes me go on doing it. Please don't laugh at me, Isa; and if you can think of anything to help me, do say it, for I'm very, very miserable."

"Well, I've thought of something," said Isabel, after a moment—"something that helped me very much once; and perhaps it will help you, though you and I aren't the same sort of creatures. But I've had my troubles too, Elly. When I first went to school, *I* was very miserable. Everybody was strange, and everything was strange; and as for me, I was always wrong somehow—doing stupid things or saying stupid things. And yet I had the queerest feeling, I don't know if I can make you understand it,—as if my life before had been a dream, and this was waking up. I never knew before what hard things there were to do in the world, and hard things to bear too. For the lessons were very difficult; all new books, you know, and so much to learn by heart. And when they

spoke French, I didn't understand it; and they said I held my hands all wrong when I played. Then I knew none of the girls; and they had all their own interests. And we used to get scolded about little things, sometimes as if they were crimes. And, do you know, more than once they were unjust to me—really and truly—and blamed me when I had done nothing wrong. Those were the governesses, of course; but the girls did not care for me either. I don't wonder, for I was so stupid; but then it was very dreary. Oh, and the days were so long!"

"Poor Isa!" said Elly, softly.

She had been listening with considerable interest to this story of her sister's experiences; which was, indeed, perfectly new to her, though she had heard much of Isabel's life at Miss Martyn's in that later time when her work and her companions had all grown familiar.

"Well, then," said Isabel, going on after a pause, in the manner of the Fitzclarence tales, "I went to spend a Saturday with Cousin Agnes. You don't know her, Elly."

"Yes; mamma took me once when she went to call."

"But that's not knowing her. Well, she and I went out a walk in the afternoon; and,—it was very funny, but I found myself talking to her as I had never done to any one before—not to mamma even. I suppose it was having no one to talk to for so long, and having wanted some one so much. But I told her all about it—the lessons, and the rules, and my own stupidity, and about being lonely. Then Cousin Agnes was so nice to me!"

"What did she say, Isa?"

"Well, I've thought of a great many things she *might* have said; and I wonder she didn't say them. Now, Aunt Annie would have told me that of course I must expect to be home-sick a little at first, but that I would

soon get over that; and, if I would only believe it, my school days were the happiest time of my life. But Cousin Agnes said nothing of that sort. She told me,"—and here Isabel's voice fell, and Elly, clinging to her, had to come closer still to catch her words,—"she told me to remember that there were no troubles too small to tell our heavenly Father about, no sins too trifling to ask the Lord Jesus Christ to take away."

Then the sisters walked up and down in silence for a while, and did not speak, or look at each other.

"It sounded much better as Cousin Agnes said it," said Isabel at last. "I wish you had heard her. It sounded as if she were so sure it was true."

"And did it help you?"

"Yes, indeed. When I remembered that, and the look in her eyes when she said it, it helped me often. I never saw any one like Cousin Agnes. You and Lou tease me about Gerty Stuart, and say I think nobody else so good. I *do* think her good: but she looks as if she were fighting hard, though she holds out like—like a hero. Then there are other people I know, who are good, and yet they seem to have no battles at all to fight, and never had any. But Cousin Agnes is quite different from any of these. She looks as if she had had hard battles, but they're over now—all fought and won."

"I thought she looked rather sad," said Elly.

"Yes, but *peacefuller* than any one else I ever saw. It was the feeling that she *knew*, that made what she said such a comfort. And I've sometimes thought it might have helped you in your nervousness, Elly. Won't you try to think of it? You know there is no use of saying your "beg pardons" now; there is not the least use of bothering yourself and other people doing that. But in-

stead of worrying and making yourself miserable, won't you remember what Cousin Agnes said?"

"I'll try never to forget it," said Elly.

Isabel was somewhat astonished at the effect of her own words, for the child's face had cleared, and her eyes were shining. Interesting Elly in things outside herself was a cure for "nervousness" which had often been tried by her sisters, but none of them had ever before ventured to deal with her troubles openly.

"You're a good sister-mother," said Elly, seizing Isabel's hand, and kissing it with a sudden impulse of gratitude; "you've given me great comfort. Yes, it wasn't mammy's hair or her collar I wanted; it was some of her inside goodness, and that's what you've got, my own Isa."

But when Isabel met the look of devoted love and admiration in Elly's innocent eyes, she turned away with a sudden pang of conscience. She left her little sister entirely consoled, but the gloom which had cleared off Elly's face seemed to have settled down on her own. For Isabel could not help remembering how seldom it was that the blessed truths she spoke of had been in her own mind of late. It is true that they had comforted her many a time at school, and helped her to work and to bear; but since she came home, it had been so easy to slip back into her old dream-life again. She had been petted because she was delicate; and not being called to exert either body or mind much, she had laid her conscience carelessly in her mother's keeping, and felt satisfied that she could do nothing very wrong while she was at home. But she had grown indolent in her habits and heedless of her duties. Alas! it was not only her dress that had been neglected that morning; she had come downstairs without Bible-reading or prayer. When Elly called her "good," and

looked at her tenderly and almost reverently, Isabel felt a hypocrite.

She went and shut herself up in her room, to do what she ought to have done in the morning, and her heart was very sad. For the first time, the responsibility she had taken upon her weighed heavily, and she felt how unfit she was to take charge of the manse and the children there. With many tears she confessed that her sins were grave indeed, compared with those which had so troubled poor Elly's peace. Trials and perplexities, too, seemed to loom darkly before her, though she scarcely knew what she feared, except that the sister who ought most to support her would stand coldly and proudly aloof.

Meanwhile Loulou sat in the dining-room all alone, and felt the time pass very slowly. She heard Isabel enter the house, and felt a thrill of pleasure, which changed into indignation and disappointment when she went straight upstairs. Motley lay beside her, but, much as she longed to read it, she felt that it would be dishonourable in her to do so while the others were away. So she sat and stitched at Dollibella's clothes until Elly burst in upon her at last, rosy and smiling. She had been at the burn-side since Isabel left her, and returned now with a great bunch of wet wild-flowers, very damp shoes and stockings, and a long rent in the skirt of her pretty striped print.

"Isn't that exhilarating?" she said, brushing her sister's face with her bouquet. "And now, Count Louis, will you mend my doublet?"

"Ask Isabel. She's mamma when mamma's away."

"But do you think she *could* do it?" asked Elly, looking doubtfully at her dress. "I don't think she could. Perhaps I had better ask Maggie, then; but I'm afraid she'll be very angry."

"Serves you right," said Loulou, speaking all the more bitterly because she was angry with herself for having dashed the gladness in her little sister's face. "What business had you going beyond the garden at all with only your slippers on? You deserve a good whipping, and I wish you had it too. Get away and change your clothes, or you'll be catching cold next, and giving more trouble."

Elly departed again, looking very crestfallen; and then Loulou suddenly flung her work away, and hid her face in her hands. "She's gone to Isabel," she said to herself, in mingled self-reproach and jealousy. "She thinks me horrid, and she's gone to Isabel! Isa talked to her till she was happy, and now I've scolded her till she's *un*happy again. And Isa likes Elly much better than she likes me; that's quite evident. She makes much more of a friend of her." Then Loulou took up Elly's plaint, and cried out passionately, "I'm so miserable! O mamma, mamma, I wish you were back again!"

But when the others came downstairs at last, Loulou met them with apparent composure, and went quietly to fetch Elly's torn frock. All the time of the reading she was busy over it, while the owner eagerly listened to stories of her favourite hero, and was quite unconscious of the fact that her sister had proved better than her word. Even when the mended dress was put into her hand, Elly did not manifest very much surprise or gratitude, for Loulou was understood to love sewing for its own sake, and it never occurred to her sisters that, even in that case, all kinds of it might not be equally agreeable.

"Have you done it?" she said. "Good and generous nobleman! The gallant and chivalrous Count Egmont is much beholden to you."

But she spoke lightly, and the warmth of her thanks

was due only to the high-flown language with which she liked to keep up her personification.

"You had better put it on again now," said Loulou; "it isn't dirty yet." As Elly left the room to obey, she followed her into the lobby, and asked, in a tone which she strove hard to render careless, "What were you and Isabel talking about so long? Anything new about Miss Martyn's?"

"Yes," said Elly, grave enough now, and rather embarrassed. "About Cousin Agnes too. I can't tell it all to you just now, Lou. Besides, I think Isa mightn't like it. But I'll ask her."

"Oh, *please*, don't put yourself about," said Loulou, grandly. "Don't, on any account. I don't care in the least. You and Isabel are quite welcome to keep your secrets to yourselves."

CHAPTER VIII.

UNSISTERLY SISTERS.

"All my faults observed,
Set in a note-book, learned and conned by rote,
To cast into my teeth."—SHAKESPEARE.

THE golden days of peace and concord which had followed the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Maitland were over now, and the times became troublous indeed. The coldness between Isabel and Loulou chilled the household, worried Elly and made her nervous, and tempted the boys to rebellion. Perhaps Isabel suffered from it least of them all. She was often annoyed by Loulou's spiteful speeches, it is true; but then she could always take comfort in thinking how undeserved they were, and how much sweeter her own temper was than her sister's. Besides, she had much satisfaction at this time in the feeling that she was becoming a person of greater importance to the little ones than she had ever been before, and was really, in some sort, filling her mother's place. Many another long conversation did she and Elly have about mental troubles and the way to meet them; and always, as at the first time, Loulou was left alone, and never informed what all the talk had been about. Elly was full of gratitude for the help her sister gave, and Isabel was naturally touched and pleased at finding herself

able to render such aid; but the position which she took in regard to the boys was much less defensible. Jim and Archy were not slow in finding out that they could always get sympathy from her when they were in difficulties with Loulou; and as it was Loulou who was governess and housekeeper, they were seldom without some complaint about the administration of the lessons or the dispensing of the eatables, which it was both convenient and comforting to bring to Isabel. Quite unwittingly the eldest sister was playing a dangerous game; and when Loulou said to herself that Isabel was setting the children against her, there was something of truth in her words. Moreover, even while Isabel was unconscious of her real feelings, and would have been shocked, indeed, had she understood how much there was of self-conceit and malice in them, she began to find it a very pleasant exercise of imagination to fancy how nicely she could manage everything at Abbotsmuir—if Loulou were only out of the way.

As for Loulou, she indulged in no delusions. She was much more practical than her sister, and keener and shrewder in her judgments, even when she had herself to deal with; and she called her own mental troubles by no prettier names than their real ones of jealousy and anger. She strove to get the better of them too, though, perhaps, not so hard as she ought to have done. She fought them because she knew they were wrong, and she fought them for her parents' sake. Because papa and mamma would be disappointed in their girl, and the pleasure of their visit to Switzerland would be spoilt, if they heard there had been quarrels at home, Loulou tried to swallow many a mortification which was bitter enough to her pride.

When I think of these trials, and how great they were to the little girl, I scarcely know whether to pity or to

smile. There was the minister who came to preach on the second Sunday of Mr. Maitland's absence, and whose entertainment had given Loulou a good deal of concern beforehand. He turned out to be a man of middle age, very easily satisfied with his quarters and his fare, and very much disposed to talk—with Isabel. His principal occupation now-a-days was not preaching, but teaching; and he had daughters of his own, as well as girl-pupils, growing up around him, so that it was not unnatural he should be greatly interested in lessons and lesson-books, and curious about the mode of imparting instruction in Miss Martyn's school. Isabel, in her desire to do credit to her teachers, rose to the occasion; and there was no lack of conversation between her and the stranger, who seemed to regard the eldest daughter of the family as a young person who had nearly completed a liberal education, while he either ignored Loulou altogether, or spoke to her with the same contemptuous kindness as he bestowed on the little boys.

This treatment was rather hard to bear for a girl who was not two years younger than her sister, and believed herself to be no wise her inferior either in sense or spirit. Nine months ago Loulou would have scoffed at the idea of there being any real inequality between them, even in outward things, and maintained that, though Isabel was tall, any one might see that she was overgrown, while her own straight little figure was quite womanly enough for her years. But now she was obliged to confess that her sister had gained an advantage over her, and one that she could not despise. Isabel had her school outfit; and her dresses, which had been made in town, were long, and trimmed, though very simply, after the manner of the time; while Loulou, like Elly and Dolly, still wore such garments of home manufacture as their mother thought suitable for

childhood in the country. Had the visitor seen her too in a close-fitting, soft brown dress, with a plaited frill at the foot, Loulou was sure that he would have shown her quite as much respect as he accorded to the tall young lady whom he addressed so punctiliously as "Miss Maitland." But what attention could any man be expected to pay to a creature (however smooth-haired and intelligent-looking) who was clad in a childish white muslin frock, with a loose body and a full skirt, and no trimming about it at all? Loulou was not sure whether or not it was a consolation to reflect that this very dress had been Isabel's own until the present summer, when the thrifty, well-washed garments had descended a step in the family, and Elly got Loulou's Sunday muslin, while Elly's was made down for Dolly. It is not a very dignified thing to wear your sister's old clothes; but then, again, it was very satisfactory for Loulou to think that, less than a year ago, Isabel had no better dress than the checked white one, and it was very short for her indeed.

All through Saturday and Sunday Loulou struggled more or less successfully with her irritation; but when Monday came, and the visitor went, a new trial awaited her. It was a rainy afternoon, and the other children were together in the dining-room, when the door opened and Elly appeared, with a face so grave that they all knew something serious had happened. Isabel, who had relapsed into an old dress, and was seated at the piano rather languidly practising exercises, jumped up immediately, and asked what it was.

"Maggie's got a letter to say her mother's ill, and she's sitting crying beside the kitchen table."

"Oh, she must go to her then!" said Isabel, full of excitement and compassion.

"She says she can't, because mamma's away." But Elly stood still with her hand on the door, evidently expecting this statement of Maggie's to be contradicted.

"What nonsense!" cried Isabel. "We can manage perfectly well without her. I'm surely old enough. She must go, of course, as soon as she can. I believe she'll catch the five o'clock train, if she's quick. I'll go and tell her so."

She and Elly both ran out of the room. Loulou rose, as if to follow; but, apparently thinking better of it, sat down again, and went on cutting out paper dolls and ornaments for the children. The other two had all the work of persuading Maggie to depart; only at the very last moment did Loulou come into the kitchen, to bid her goodbye before she set off through the rain on her five-miles' walk to the station. And afterwards, while Isabel and Elly were talking eagerly about Maggie, and her journey, and her home, the second sister kept silence, or only spoke to the little ones about the toys she was making for them. Isabel marvelled at first over her apparent heartlessness, and then came to the conclusion that her conduct in this affair was only a repetition, on a smaller scale, of the part she had played before her parents went to Switzerland. She did not notice that though Loulou seemed careless of Maggie's sorrows, she was certainly not careless of Maggie's duties. I doubt whether Isabel was quite conscious who it was that prepared tea, and washed the dishes afterwards, and took the little ones to bed at the usual hour. If she spent a thought on such matters at all, it was only to say to herself that there never was a girl so fond of bustling about as Loulou.

"Where are you going now?" she asked in rather an aggrieved tone, when the three had gone upstairs for the

night, and Loulou turned away from the door of the girls' room.

"To sleep with Dolly," was the brief reply.

"Ah! I forgot the dear Trottie would be all alone," said Elly. "But come and undress beside us, and hear about Harry and Aimée."

"No; I'm very tired. Good-night." And Loulou vanished into the nursery.

"Now, I would never have thought of Dolly," said Elly to Isabel. "But Loulou remembers almost everything. She has such a good memory."

"It's a pity she hasn't a better temper, then," her sister answered crossly. She had prepared a story for the evening's entertainment, and being accustomed to have her sisters as eager to listen as she was to tell, she felt Loulou's unexpected defection as little less than an insult. It was all very well, of course, to sleep in the nursery with Dolly; but why need she shut herself up there at this early hour? In meditative disapproval of Loulou's sulkiness, Isabel undressed herself silently, while poor Elly, disappointed of a story by the pique of one sister, and finding all her attempts at conversation frustrated by the offended dignity of the other, retired to bed in a very dejected state of mind.

Isabel overslept herself again next morning, but (so easily are bad habits acquired) she took it very coolly this time. Though later than she had been on the day after the West Mains party, she went through her toilet in a very leisurely manner, and her peaceful mood was undisturbed until she entered the dining-room, to find the table cleared, and the business of the forenoon in progress. Surprised and bewildered, Isabel looked from the little boys, busy over their copy-books, to Loulou, who was dusting the ornaments on the mantlepiece and did not turn round.

"What's the meaning of this?" she demanded

"The meaning of what?"

"No breakfast!"

There was a moment's pause before Loulou replied, with great composure,—"Breakfast was ready at the proper time. The things were taken away half an hour ago; they're all washed now, and in the pantry."

Isabel went off in high indignation to seek Susan, but Susan was not to be found. She was obliged at last to be satisfied with getting herself some bread and milk, which she carried into the study, and sitting down in her father's large arm-chair, waited for sympathy. None came, however. Susan did not seek out her young mistress, nor did any of the children come to visit their kind sister; and as time went on, the silent and dignified vigil in the study became rather tedious. All through the rest of the house there were sounds of very active life: Loulou's feet were flying hither and thither, upstairs and downstairs, through bed-rooms, pantry, and kitchen; and Dolly seemed to be trotting busily after her. From the dining-room the boys' voices were heard, mingled for a while with the strumming and tinkle of Elly's practising. Isabel felt not only ill-used, but deserted. How unkind they all were, and how entirely that was Loulou's fault! Loulou was keeping Elly and the little ones away from her, and doubtless bullied them dreadfully, now that there was no one to protect them from her tyranny. For a time Isabel contemplated writing a formal complaint to Interlachen, but gave up the idea at last, on the ground that it would be scarcely virtuous on her own part to cause any annoyance to her parents at present. When they came home, of course, it would be a different matter; and if Loulou did not reform before then, her sister's duty was plain. Meanwhile, Isabel

must suffer patiently and bravely, as she had done heretofore, and most notably on this very morning, when, after being so sorely tried, she had left the room without saying an angry word, or even slamming the door. She found much comfort in thinking of her own exemplary behaviour, and recurred again and again to the pleasing subject, as the best means of whiling away the lonely hours.

At last Elly appeared, looking worried and out of humour. "You're here, are you?" said she. "You've been sitting in the study all the time!"

"Loulou has made the room she was in so unpleasant to me," began Isabel haughtily; but Elly cut her short,—

"You needn't have stayed out of the dining-room because of Loulou. She's scarcely been there all morning."

"Well, I chose to be where she wouldn't come at all—not even 'scarcely,'" said Isabel, trying to maintain a lofty manner. "And *why* wasn't she there?"

"She's had to make beds and all sorts of things. It's the washing-day, you know."

"I didn't know. How could I?" asked Isabel. "The German custom of washing only every month or two must be—"

"Oh! a horrid dirty thing," interrupted Elly. "Isa, I hope I'll never have to be a governess. Children are *so* stupid, and *so* idle, and *so* ungrateful for all the trouble one takes in teaching them."

"I suppose that means you've been hearing the boys their lessons," said Isabel with some scorn. "Well! Loulou scolds them enough, certainly, but I never saw there was any need for it. They behave very well, when people take the right way with them."

"Suppose you try it yourself," suggested Elly.

"So I mean to do—to-morrow."

"Good success to you, then. May you find a royal road to learning for Hoogstraaten and Brederode!"

Elly had talked herself into good humour again, and now began to run up and down the room, her eyes bright with the thoughts of a story. She was just throwing up her arms, as if to waft herself into sweet dreamland, when she seemed suddenly to remember that she had something to settle in this world first. Her hands went down, and her looks grew grave, as she turned back to the arm-chair. "Isa," said she in a coaxing tone, "don't you think you might be nicer to Lou?"

The unexpected question struck Isabel like a blow. *This* from the little sister who loved and admired her so much! "Is Lou nice to me?" she asked, half sobbing,—"sending away the breakfast—giving me none!"

Elly stood irresolute. She could scarcely bear to see any one cry, and yet a sense of justice prevented her giving all her sympathy to Isabel. "But why were you so late?" she said,—"this morning of all mornings, when Maggie was away, and there was so much to do?"

"Did any one tell me there was much to do? And I didn't sleep well in the night; I lay awake a long time. I had a headache in the morning, too. But nobody cares, of course." Isabel buried her face in her handkerchief, and Elly was fairly vanquished.

"Oh, *poor* thing! We *do* care; but Loulou didn't know. I'll go and tell her."

"No, no," said Isabel. "Tell her *nothing;* but love your own Isa, and don't turn against her. And now go for the 'Dutch Republic.' We'll not have time for any reading unless we begin just now."

Elly departed with great celerity, and appeared again

presently, bringing not only Motley, but Loulou. This calm way of taking it for granted that the reading could not go on without her was not exactly to Isabel's mind; but she tried to preserve an air of unconcern. "Here's our lady-help," said Elly. Then looking wistfully from one sister to another, she added gently, "Poor Isa's got a headache, Louly. She didn't sleep well last night."

"I'm sorry," said Loulou stiffly.

Isabel meditated for a little whether this should be accepted as an apology for the insult of the morning, but finally decided in the negative. "I am very much obliged to you," she answered, imitating her sister's tone.—"Elly, the book, if you please."

Frigid politeness was now the weapon which the couple chose to employ against each other, and their efforts at sarcasm were very successful in keeping a distance between them. Elly and the boys looked on with mingled amusement and discomfort; such civil speeches and carefully modulated tones had been hitherto unknown in the free-and-easy life which the sisters and brothers led together. Even when the post came in the afternoon, and Isabel found there were no less than three letters for herself, she was not too excited to say in her blandest voice, "Thank you very much indeed," to Loulou, who brought in the budget. But the sister with whom she was on such distant terms was not to see the inside of her school-fellows' letters; Isabel fled upstairs with her treasures, and shut herself in her own room.

In the midst of her reading she was vaguely conscious that there suddenly arose a scream from beneath, but it was only when she arrived at the end of her last sheet she was able to realize the fact that the house was filled with the sound of loud crying. Had some accident happened;

or was Loulou taking the opportunity of her sister's absence to injure one of the children? Isabel's mind leapt immediately to the latter conclusion, and flinging away her defensive armour of cold silence, she rushed to the rescue, full of virtuous indignation, eager to avenge the oppressed. She found Archy standing motionless at the dining-room door, his eyes shut, and his mouth wide open, bawling with all his might. Loulou, within, was putting the finishing touches to the afternoon arrangement of the room. When Isabel rushed upon the scene and caught Archy in her arms, she ceased patting out the wrinkles on the table-cloth, and stood still where she was, looking full at her sister.

"What's the matter with you, my dear, dear little boy? Tell Isa, my poor child."

"My wurrums!" screamed Archy. "My wur-rums! She's throwed them yall away!"

"Thrown away your worms? the worms you dug up for bait!" said Isabel, glaring at the tyrant over the grief-bowed head of the victim. She felt too angry for sarcasm, too angry, indeed, to consider her words in the least. "Shame on you, Loulou! How can you be so cruel to mamma's little boys while she's away? O you self-willed, ill-tempered girl, you've been such a hindrance to me ever since she left! We could be so happy, everything would go on so well, if it weren't for you!"

"Would it?" said Loulou, white with passion. "Try, then. I leave everything to you. I wash my hands of it all." She walked out of the room, with her head high and her lips firmly set, though she was visibly trembling.

"Nyasty, mean *gurl!*" said Archy, as she passed him.

"She is that; but we mustn't be like her," said Isabel, virtuously. And even as she spoke, she heard the door of

the spare bed-room upstairs closed and locked behind her sister. "There—she's gone now; don't cry any more. You can dig other worms, can't you? Wipe your eyes with my handkerchief; and see! here's a penny to buy hooks. Now, don't cry any more. *Don't*, like a good little boy."

"After all, it is very easy to comfort children, if you only take the right way with them," Isabel thought triumphantly, when Archy very soon stopped screaming, and went off to the garden with an April face. She lay down on the dining-room sofa then, and proceeded to review the situation. She was victorious: Loulou had abandoned the field with scarcely a struggle: the completeness of her defeat, and her own acceptance of the fact, were very astonishing to Isabel. But undoubtedly it was best as it was. It was quite time for Loulou to learn who was the elder sister and the mistress, and if the lesson had turned out a sharp one, it was nobody's fault but her own. As for Isabel, she felt it was not her nature to be unkind to any one. If she had spoken severely a few minutes ago, that was only because tenderness and chivalry alike moved her to take the weaker side and defend her poor little brother. Only cowards fear to denounce oppression and wrong, Isabel told herself proudly.

And now, when her own reign had come, and Loulou was not to interfere at all (for Isabel meant to keep her sister to the very letter of her promise), love was to be the law of the Abbotsmuir Manse, and great peace and prosperity would certainly be the result. Household duties must be attended to, of course, but this was to be done without unnecessary bustle, and, above all, without that rigid attention to rule which spoils the comfort of so many families. Upon this branch of her duties, however, Isabel did not spend much thought. But the children! There

was no end to her plans for their benefit. Jim and Archy were to be scolded no more, either about their lessons or anything else; on the contrary, they would find all difficulties smoothed away from the path of knowledge, their tastes consulted, and their pleasures treated as matters of importance. Elly was to be made so happy in the new state of things that she would never be nervous; if it were possible to pet Dolly more than was already done, Isabel would find a way to manage it. Exulting over the whole, and filling in minor details by turns, Isabel prepared her romance about the wonders her influence was to work on her young brothers and sisters, much in the same way as she made her Fitzclarence stories. If the pleasure was no less, the excitement was greater, and the amount of brain-work and mental energy she expended was more than the most thrilling tale about Harry and Aimée had ever cost her.

Isabel's musings were interrupted at last by the sound of the boys' voices, distinctly heard through the open window. Their sister soon gathered from their talk that they were trying to recover their lost property, which seemed to have been flung among the shrubs at the side of the house. Jim reproached Archy for not having made the attempt sooner, and Archy defended himself on the ground that he had been in the village spending the money he had got, adding, in a cheerful tone, that another shower of rain would bring out worms in plenty. To this Jim assented, and then remarked with a chuckle, "Wish Loulou would throw them all out again, if Isa would give us another penny for it." Isabel, listening inside, began to feel rather uncomfortable, as the idea occurred to her that much of her pity had been wasted, and that rage must have had something to do with those heart-rending screams which

she had attributed entirely to grief. But a still more disagreeable light was to be thrown on the subject before the afternoon was over.

By-and-by Susan passed along, on her way from the washing-house to the bleaching green, a basket of wet clothes on her arm. "What were you roaring at a while ago?" she asked, as she came to Archy, burrowing underneath the shrubs. His answer was an inarticulate murmur of embarrassment; but Jim spoke up rather defiantly—"Loulou threw away all our worms."

"Had you them in the house?" said Susan sharply. Then, interpreting silence as consent, she added, raising her voice a little, as she walked away, "Well, you know your mamma said what was to be done if ever that happened again."

As that speech fell on her ears, Isabel fairly writhed with mortification. She had been made a fool of, she said; for she was by no means inclined to use the expression in its correct form, and confess she had made a fool of herself. But, oddly enough, it was not Archy she blamed so much as Loulou. One word of explanation from that most stubborn and provoking girl would have put everything right; but, instead of giving it, she had walked off proudly and sullenly, delighted to be able for once to leave her sister in the wrong. Oh, it was too bad of her! But Isabel's visions had been too bright to fade away all at once, even before the stern reality of this most unwished for illumination. After the first moments of shame and vexation, she plucked up courage again, and told herself that her conduct had not been so silly after all. She had made a mistake, but that was because she was still entangled with Loulou. Now that she was free, there was little fear of anything more of that

sort happening. When her sister re-appeared, she would make her an apology, but so worded that it would convey a reproach. She would retract the particular accusation she had made of cruelty in the matter of the worms, but not a word of the general ones about her evil temper, and her being a hindrance to the happiness of the household. And if it were possible for her to prevent it, even by writing to Interlachen, Loulou should never slip back into her old place again.

The sound of the clock striking five roused Isabel to the recollection that tea would need to be prepared. She did not wish Loulou to find things in a backward state when she came downstairs. But the afternoon's excitement had brought back her headache of the morning with redoubled violence, and when she rose from the sofa, she felt so giddy at first that she had to hold on to the table for support. It was not a favourable time for undertaking duties about which she would have been rather awkward at the best. The pantry and cupboards were unfamiliar to her—she had scarcely seen the inside of them since before she went to school; and Isabel's time at Miss Martyn's seemed nearly as long to her as all the rest of her life. Happily for her, however, the kitchen establishment of the manse was not large enough to be hopelessly bewildering to the most inexperienced person, and sooner or later the young housekeeper found most of the things she wanted. With trembling, unskilful fingers, she measured out tea, set the table, cut the bread, and skimmed the cream, taking twice as long for the work as her well-practised sister would have done. But meddling with the large kitchen kettle was more than Isabel's courage was equal to; and after surveying the bubbling, hissing monster timidly from every point of view, she at last

fetched Susan from the washing-house to cope with it for her.

All through her preparations she was constantly expecting Loulou's return; but even when the sound of the tea-bell brought Elly and the little ones hurrying in, the door upstairs never opened. Isabel, though amazed at the persistency of her sister's sullenness, could not but feel relieved that she was not present to see the state in which the boys were allowed to sit at table. "What sort of hands are these, Jim?" she had asked, reprovingly, as a very black and loathsome paw was stretched out to the bread-plate.

"Nobody gave us any hot water. Cold wouldn't wash *these*," he said, looking with some pride at his fingers.

"Did you try?" Isabel asked; but she got no answer, and had not spirit enough to pursue the investigation.

As soon as they finished eating, the little fellows rushed again out of doors, and then Isabel had the opportunity of doing to her sister as she had done to her in the morning, and taking the things to the kitchen. It was therefore with a serene consciousness of her own magnanimity that she desired Elly to tell Loulou that every one else had finished tea, and she had better come down if she wanted any. Isabel heard her own message shouted through the closed door, but the answer was inaudible. Elly brought it back to her as she waited in the dining-room. "She says 'No' —nothing but 'No.'"

Then Isabel carefully and laboriously packed all the tea things on the tray, loading it so heavily that she staggered under the weight, and was considerably surprised, as well as relieved, when she carried it to the kitchen without an accident. She felt a little hurt that Elly had not stayed in the house to help her, instead of

returning to the garden, and her unfailing resource of inward story-telling; for it seemed that in thus deserting her eldest sister, she was tacitly taking part with the second one. But it is improbable that Elly was actuated by any deep motive at all, Loulou having never taught her that it needed two people to clear a table.

Isabel sat down to rest for a moment, and was just considering the question of washing the dishes, when the outer door was burst open, and the boys appeared, dirtier than ever, and greatly excited. Jim held his fishing-rod proudly aloft, while Archy brandished a long supple switch, with a piece of string waving at the end. "Isa! we want you to come to the river with us. Do, do, do!"

Seeing the coming refusal in her face, they flew to stop it with caresses; but Isabel shrieked, and held out her hands to keep them off. "Don't come near me," she cried. "You're too filthy to touch. And, see, you're leaving muddy footprints on the floor! What will Susan say?—I'll go to the river with you to-morrow."

"We want to go to-night—to-night," they said both at once.

"Fish in the burn to-night," their sister suggested insinuatingly; for, though the river was forbidden to them unless they were accompanied by some older person, the little ones might roam at will about the safe and familiar streamlet.

The boys, however, rejected the proposal with disdain. "The burn's no fun," said Jim.—"No sea-tyout yere," said Archy.—"Do come to the river," they both repeated.

"You'll be as likely to catch sea-trout in the one as the other," Isabel answered, with scarcely veiled contempt. But remembering her *rôle* of kind elder sister, she went on hastily—"I'll go to the river with you to-morrow, when-

ever you like. I would go to-night, but I'm so tired, and my head aches. You don't want to be unkind to poor Isa?" she added, in a tone of pathos, as she saw the round faces reddening with anger and disappointment.

"*Do* come! *do* come!" cried the boys.

"I tell you I can't. You've no idea how tired I am." Isabel was speaking petulantly in spite of herself.

"But come! Do, do, *do* come!"

"I tell you I won't. I—will—not. Do you hear? Once for all, *I—will—not.*"

The boys burst into tears and cries, stamping about the floor with their muddy boots, and kicking such pieces of furniture as were within their reach. Isabel threatened and remonstrated; but her words had not the slightest effect until they were enforced by the handle of a big broom, which she seized at last in desperation. Before this formidable weapon Jim and Archy fled at once, though it was their sister, poor girl! who felt all the humiliation of this vulgar appeal to force. It was terribly mortifying to think that the fear of blows could so easily overcome the boys, to whom her gentleness and her sufferings had been as nothing.

"You're as cross as Loulou!" was Jim's parting shot, as he retreated across the yard.

"Much kyosser!" said Archy, "much kyosser!"

Isabel deigned no reply, but the words rankled. She sat down again in the disorderly kitchen, and presently Elly came to the window to ask why Archy was screaming so. "It takes precious little to make him howl," was Isabel's answer. And then it occurred to her that perhaps it was a pity such an idea had not come into her mind a little earlier in the day.

Well, there was no doubt now that Loulou ought to have

an apology; and she would get it—and a handsome one, too, Isabel resolved—when she came downstairs. The reproachful tone should be left out of it; and, after acknowledging her own mistake pleasantly, Isabel would let her sister see that she excused her abominable fit of sulkiness, on the plea that she really had some provocation. Isabel never for a moment imagined that Loulou might reject her overtures of peace. She expected her to return rather shame-faced, but much inclined to be friendly, and very anxious to wash the dishes, and put things to rights, which Isabel would willingly allow her to do now, in consideration of her own headache. In a very short time all unhappiness would doubtless be forgotten. For Isabel did not consider Loulou a girl of keen feeling. "Sensible, but not sensitive," was the character she had always given to this sister of hers when she described the different members of her family to her special friends at school.

Little did she know that Loulou would not have given her forgiveness then though she had implored it on her bended knees. The girl was wild with passion. All the pent-up irritation of weeks had burst forth, and swept reason and prudence and affection away with it. Up and down and up and down the room she went, with rapid, noiseless footsteps, her hands so tightly clasped, that the nails left marks in her flesh. If sheer exhaustion forced her to sit down at times, it was only for a minute; she was up and pacing the floor again as soon as she recovered breath.

At first she measured her steps to the sound of "Let her try it—let her try it—let her try it!" muttered between her teeth. Then it was, "I've borne long enough—long enough—long enough!" But she spoke with little consciousness of her own words; she was in a delirium of

rage, and could think connectedly of nothing. After a time, however, the wildest of the storm passed, and she was able to meditate upon her wrongs, and speculate about what was happening downstairs. Partly by hearing, and partly by guessing, she attained to a pretty accurate knowledge of the progress of events, and had many a scornful laugh over Isabel's troubles. And yet, the girl who had flung away the work she could do so well was much more miserable than the one who was making blundering efforts to fill her place downstairs. Loulou had a constitutional dislike to idleness, and there was nothing in the spare bed-room to occupy either hands or head. She wished she had had presence of mind enough to take her work-box and a book with her in her exile; but she was far too proud to go back for anything of that sort now. The hours passed very slowly in that dreary, aimless walk; but no amount of dulness would make Loulou acknowledge, by word or deed, to the sister who had banished her, that solitude was not the most delightful thing in the world. And before the evening was over her obstinacy was crowned with triumph. When Isabel had got Archy and Dolly to bed, by dint of coaxing and bribery, and had submitted to Jim's sulky decision that he would "go when he pleased, but certainly not for her," she turned her steps towards the spare bed-room. Loulou heard her coming, and paused inside about a yard from the door, with an expression of vindictive dislike on her face that would have shocked her sister, could she but have seen it.

"Loulou, won't you come down now and have some fun?" (This meant a Fitzclarence story.) "There's no one in the dining-room but Elly and me."

Not a word of answer came to this appeal.

"*Loulou!*" Isabel's voice was almost coaxing, and her

lips were close to the door. "Loulou! isn't it silly to be cross so long? Come out now, and be friends."

Still the same dead silence.

"Loulou! Loulou! Loulou!" Isabel called and listened by turns, but there was never a motion within. She rapped sharply on the door, and then turned and twisted the handle, in the sudden and vain hope that she might not be locked out after all.

But all her noisy pleadings were met by the same immovable stillness, which was so perfect that she turned away at last more in fear than in anger. She and Elly began to think that Loulou did not mean to come out at all that night; but when the two were in their room, and all the house was quiet, the unlocking and opening of a door was heard, quickly followed by the closing and locking of another. Then Isabel and Elly knew that though Loulou was determined to have nothing to do with them, she had gone to the nursery to sleep with Dolly.

There was no story told in the girls' room that night, and it would have been difficult to say which of its inmates was the most disconsolate. They both betook themselves very soon to their prayers, and after Isabel had asked that Loulou might be brought out of her evil temper, she put up a petition that, if she too had been unkind, she might be forgiven and shown a better way. This she did, rather because she was perplexed and miserable, than because she was conscience-stricken; but vague as her prayer and repentance were, they were doubtless—though she knew it not—the first steps on the road to peace.

CHAPTER IX.

LOULOU'S DESERTION.

"But the wood, all close and clenching,
Bough in bough, and root in root,
No more sky (for overbranching)
At your head than at your foot,—
Oh, the wood drew me within it with a glamour past dispute."
E. B. BROWNING.

"WHAT *is* the meaning of this?" was Elly's first exclamation next morning, uttered in a tone of dismay.

Isabel, who for once had risen first, and was contemplating with great pity the reflection of her own pale face in the glass, turned paler when her sister spoke, and came hastily to look over her shoulder.

The girls' room was an addition made to the manse when the little Maitlands became numerous, and, built as it was over the kitchen premises, it commanded an excellent view of the yard, the out-houses, and the vestry of the church. And what Isabel and Elly saw this morning was Loulou coming from the back door underneath — Loulou, dressed as if for a long walk, in her oldest frock and thickest boots, and carrying a large tin can over her arm. She stopped for a moment to speak to Dandy, who was eagerly offering his company; and the sisters above gazed at her in silent amazement.

"Speak to her, Elly," whispered Isabel at last; "she won't answer me. Ask her where she's going."

Then Elly opened the window, and called out to Loulou, who moved on without turning her head.

"Where are you off to at this hour?"

"To gather blaeberries."

"Without any breakfast?"

"I've had some."

"O wait till we're ready, and we'll all come with you!"

The yard gate banged behind Loulou's retreating figure, and Elly let the window down with a clap, and turned to Isabel, who looked ready to cry.

"What can I do to her?" she said helplessly.

"What *have* you done to her?" asked Elly.

"I made a mistake. I didn't know about something, and she wouldn't explain. I was angry, we quarrelled; I spoke hastily, I suppose. But is there any use keeping it up like this? I would apologize now if she wanted." Isabel spoke in disjointed sentences as she proceeded hastily with her dressing. "Did you ever see such a sulky girl?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Elly, dubiously.

"But she won't stay away all day, will she?" Isabel went on anxiously. "She never could do that, surely!"

"I don't know," said Elly again.

"Well, I can't understand her," said Isabel with a sigh. "And neither can you, I suppose."

That was true. These softer-natured girls were incapable of comprehending the determined resentment which Loulou's strong will and proud spirit could keep up. Now that the "sensible but not sensitive" theory had been knocked to pieces by the extraordinary conduct of last night and this morning, Isabel felt herself left without any

key that would fit her sister's character, or any instinct of her own that might help her to guess her feelings. She herself might be—and often was—peevish and fretful; she could fly into sudden passion, as she had done yesterday; but the very discomfort of being on unfriendly terms with others made her speedily seek a reconciliation with them. On this occasion, although she did not yet see clearly how much she had wronged Loulou, she had been made so miserable, and even afraid, by her haughty sullenness, that her greatest wish was to propitiate her, and bring her back to the family life again.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," she said after a pause. "She'll certainly be back by tea-time, and when she comes we'll receive her as if nothing had happened, and let bygones be bygones. She'll be glad enough to have it so by that time! We'll try to please her. We'll have tea outside, and do everything to keep her in good-humour; and I'll tell you what else we'll do—we'll keep Motley, and not read him till the evening!"

In the glow of her satisfaction with these generous proposals, Isabel ran gaily down to the dining-room, where she found the boys already seated at the table, and hard at work on their porridge. It was vexing to have to begin the day with scolding, but there was no help for it; their appearance was too remarkable.

"Where are your collars and ties? And don't you know you're not allowed to come here without your slippers? And I think," she added with some hesitation, "I think —you've forgotten to wash yourselves!"

"Every second day's enough," said Jim coolly.

Isabel knew she ought to send them back to their bedroom immediately, but they looked so very much as if they would refuse to go, that she put off her duty to a more

convenient season, and quieted her conscience by bestowing more scolding on the culprits. "You're both very naughty, dirty boys," she said severely. "You ought not to need Maggie now to dress you as if you were babies. As soon as you've done breakfast you must wash yourselves *thoroughly*. You had no right to come into the dining-room in such a mess—you never would have dared if mamma had been here! And you had no business to go and help yourselves to porridge either."

"Loulou's out, and you're always late," was the answer.

"I wasn't late this morning; I came down as soon as the bell rang. No, you have no excuse; and, of course, you've been spilling and messing—milk on the cloth, porridge over the side of the bowl—disgusting! And what's this doing here?"

As she spoke, she seized a tin canister which was standing bottom upwards on the sideboard, in close proximity to the porridge-plates. The little boys, who had diligently continued eating, without paying much heed to their sister's remarks, suddenly ceased plying their spoons, and shouted lustily, "Take care, I say! take care!"

But it was too late. Isabel had lifted the tin with an impatient flourish of her arm, which swung it backwards over her head; and immediately a whole cascade of worms descended on her neck and shoulders. In an instant the house was ringing with screams—of laughter from the boys, of anguish from Isabel. No wonder Susan and Elly rushed terrified to the dining room; and poor Dolly, lonely and neglected in her crib upstairs, joined her own voice to the chorus.

"What is it, Miss Maitland? what is it, my dear?" cried Susan, when she found Isabel standing in the middle of the floor, and shaking herself violently, while Jim and

Archy, on their hands and knees on the carpet, were eagerly picking up their scattered possessions.

"The worms!" shrieked Isabel, much as Archy had done the day before. "O Susan! O help me! See if there are any more about me. Are they in my hair? O take off my collar—I think there are some down my neck!"

At this the boys rolled over on the carpet in convulsions of suppressed merriment, and Susan turned round upon them in anger and suspicion: "What have you been doing? Did you throw your worms at her?"

"She did it herself," said Jim; but not feeling perfectly clear of guilt in the matter, he thought it wise to depart with his refilled canister before Susan had time for further investigations. Archy, more curious, and perhaps more pitiful, stayed to watch the efforts she and Elly were making to comfort Isabel.

"I took up the canister," said the afflicted girl, in answer to their tender inquiries. "It was lying there—I didn't know what it was; how could I? I took it up—like this. And there was no lid!"

"Ye yid's yost, yong ago," said Archy.

"The worms fell out," said Isabel, shuddering and sobbing, "all over me. Oh, horrible! Do look, Susan—are you sure they're all gone?"

"Yes, yes, yes," said the kindly little maidservant, as she stroked and patted her tall young mistress. "It's all right now. Jim's taken the beasts all away; I don't see one. So don't you cry any more, but sit down and take your breakfast."

The last suggestion seemed almost sarcastic; but Isabel did sit down, on condition that Elly would now take her turn of examining her closely. Elly complied as well as she could, while keeping a respectful distance, and reported

that not a single worm was to be seen about her person. Then Archy, in all good faith, delivered his piece of consolation to his suffering sister.

"Never mind, Isa. Your thyows is not so bad as Youyou's. Wurrums can't get yost here in the yoom."

In the midst of all her misery, Isabel acknowledged then, with a pang that was half of self-ridicule, the stern poetic justice that fate had meted out to her. Her ignorant anger had recoiled upon herself, and she had literally brought her punishment on her own head. In taking Archy's part against Loulou yesterday, she had, all unwittingly, maintained the boys' right to keep their things where they chose; and she could not blame them now because they exercised it. For the first time she began to understand clearly what it was that Loulou had done. She had found the canister as Isabel found it, but, immediately guessing its contents, she had lifted it with the slight, adroit jerk which would have knocked the worms *in*, not *out;* then, carrying it bottom downwards to the window, she had sent the whole with a hard and steady fling out on the earth underneath the shrubs. And oh! how Isabel wished she had been there that morning to do it over again.

The hubbub was dying down when it was suddenly raised again by the entrance of Dolly, in her night-gown and bare feet, sobbing piteously. Just as she crossed the threshold down went her foot on a worm, which had fallen at some distance from the others, and had therefore been overlooked by Jim in his haste. Isabel, catching sight of it, screamed out immediately; and Dolly's sobs turned into yells, though they were caused rather by indignation and hunger than by any disgust at the slimy thing that was wriggling about her toes.

"You've kyushed him, Dolly!" cried Archy in alarm. "No; him's all yight! Come to your own master, dear wurrum."

He took it up tenderly, and Dolly stopped her crying to gaze with interest as he consigned it to the pocket of his jacket. This specimen, it appeared, was a particular favourite, owing to its great length and the peculiarity of its colour.

But when Archy went off with his pet, Dolly's grief returned. She had wakened up to find herself without any human companionship, and Dollibella's had become tedious after a while. She wanted her breakfast, and she wanted to go out; but every one had apparently forgotten her, and the little queen was too unaccustomed to neglect to bear it patiently. In Isabel's distress and remorse for her conduct to her small sister, she began to forget the shock that had been given to her own nerves. She roused herself to wrap Dolly in a shawl and set her at the table; she should have her porridge first and be dressed afterwards. But Dolly was too cold and cross to be easily pacified; she whimpered between every spoonful of her breakfast, and kept up her wailing steadily all the time her sister was washing and clothing her. Isabel felt her own awkwardness as nursery-maid hard enough to bear without the fretfulness of her charge, and, for the first time perhaps in her life, she found herself losing patience with her darling. "There now, get away with you," she said at last in relief, as she fastened the sash of her pinafore. "Take Dollibella; here's your hat; run out to the garden, and be quiet."

Away went Dolly with a grumble for every step of the stair, beginning with, "I want mamma!" and ending with, "I want Loulou!" Isabel remained in the nursery,

and there Elly found her, seated disconsolate upon the floor beside the bath; Dolly's comb and brush, night-dress and slippers scattered around her. "Well," said the younger sister, "you look classical. Marius on the ruins of Carthage is rather hackneyed; but that's the sort of thing."

"You must help me," said Isabel, rising hastily and beginning to put away the things. "I was just thinking what to do next, and I suppose it's the beds. Come to our room first."

"But my practising?"

"Oh, leave it for one day; I'll take the responsibility. I'm sure mother wouldn't object to your helping me."

"And what about the boys' lessons?"

"We must skip them too," said Isabel, decidedly. "I can't help it; we have too much to do; and it won't matter for once. I don't believe we could get the boys, either, if we wanted them. They've been out since breakfast-time, and they wouldn't likely come in though we called till we made our throats sore. Besides, the very sight of them just now would make me think of—*worms!*"

And this was the ardent young governess of yesterday! If Elly had ever taunted any one in her life, she might have reminded Isabel now of her promise to show how easy it was to manage the boys when one took the right way with them. Yet Elly had not been told half of the grandeur of her sister's plans, as the maker thereof remembered gladly when she announced her intention of dispensing with lessons altogether that day.

"I can't make beds, though," said Elly.

"Oh, we'll manage. We'll not turn the mattress,—that won't matter for one day; we'll spread up the clothes just as they are."

But this was easier said than done. The little Maitlands were all restless sleepers, and had twisted their blankets and sheets into a confusion which the inexperienced housemaids found well-nigh inextricable.

"After all, it's my own bed, and I won't complain," was the remark with which Isabel was fain to comfort herself at last. "But I'm afraid Susan will laugh when she sees those hills and valleys; and I don't think this *is* the top sheet that we've put on the top. Perhaps there's no difference, after all—never mind if there is; let it alone, and come to your bed."

"Oh for one hour of Loulou!" said Elly. "What a shame it is of her to leave us all this to do."

But Isabel felt it scarcely fair to let this pass. "It was my fault, I suppose, if fault there is," said she, with some hesitation. "I believe I told her we should manage better without her."

Elly let fall her end of the sheet they were waving between them, and stared at her sister. "What *could* make you say that?" she asked.

"Do mind what you're about," was the pettish answer, followed after a moment by, "Well, it was silly, I suppose."

"And besides, it was a lie," said the plain-spoken younger sister.

"No, no, no. It was true enough in the sense in which I meant it, though perhaps not in the sense she took it," protested Isabel.

But Elly was not to be taken in by grand speeches. "What was the sense in which you meant it, then?" she asked; and Isabel found it difficult to give an answer.

"Loulou is so conceited and so impudent," she said, evading the question; "she thinks she can do everything,

and you seem to think the same about her too. You think I understand nothing about the house; and the boys are always going to her about things—and so does Susan; just as if it were Lou who was mistress when mamma's away!"

Isabel did not find it very easy to work herself into a passion, though she was trying very hard. Somehow her wrongs sounded silly and undignified when they were put into words; even in her thoughts they had dwindled very small since Loulou went away. And while Isabel faltered out her complaints, Elly was regarding her with an odd mixture of pity and amusement in her face—a very different expression from the one with which she had heard of Cousin Agnes. Isabel caught the look at last, and was roused into some indignation. "I can do house-work at least as well as you," said she.

"Oh yes! I hate it; I know nothing about it," said the little girl, frankly, as she went down on her knees to tuck the sheet laboriously under the mattress. "Housewives must be like poets, don't you think?—born, not made."

"You forget, too," continued Isabel, "that Loulou isn't the only one who is away. Mamma's away, and Maggie is away. Could I do the work of all three?—get up early, wash the boys, dress Dolly, look after the breakfast, take away the things (oh dear, I believe they're all on the table yet!), make the beds, set the dinner—" So far in her description of an impossibility had Isabel got, when she was stopped by a sudden thought, flashed to her, not by Elly's eyes, but by her own conscience. *All these things Loulou had done yesterday!* Isabel let fall the pillow she was shaking violently to emphasize her words, and her face took a curious expression of humiliation and annoyance. All these things Loulou had done yesterday, with-

out complaint, without boasting, quite as a matter of course; and when she had completed the work which Isabel now declared was beyond the power of a single girl, she had been told that she was a hindrance to the household comfort, and that everything would get on better without her! Out of her own mouth Isabel was convicted of the falsehood she had spoken in her anger yesterday.

"I give up," said she, hastily, "I give up! Loulou is a wonderful girl, and I was a fool for denying it. I'll tell her so—and let us hope she will be satisfied—when she comes back again."

This she said not without a certain proud consciousness of her own humility—one virtue, at least, in which she felt herself Loulou's superior still. Also, she could not help expecting that now, when her confession had been made, her punishment would cease. It seemed impossible that in the midst of her penitence she should have to finish making the beds. But so it was, though Isabel kept an attentive ear for the sound of the gate swinging open to admit the blaeberry gatherer, softened and anxious to help, hurrying home to her sisters. Loulou did not come, and the forenoon passed on; the bed-rooms were put into something like order, and Isabel went down reluctantly to attend to the breakfast dishes.

Again she carried an overloaded tray to the kitchen, and again surveyed the large kettle with frightened eyes. At last she set to work with cold water to wash the cups and saucers; but Susan, coming in to prepare dinner, discovered her in the disgraceful act, and took the tub away from her with unconcealed contempt. "I'll manage myself," she said; and Isabel, thus dismissed, retired to the dining-room more in mortification than relief, and hiding

her face in the sofa-cushions, took her turn of crying for her mother, and wishing she had never gone.

Things looked a little brighter at dinner-time, however. Susan, of her own accord, fetched the children from the garden, and sent them in clean and tidy to their sisters; and the little boys, feeling rather uneasy about having played truant, brought the propitiatory offerings of great quietness and good behaviour during the meal. Of course, they had the excuse of Loulou's absence to plead for their own non-appearance at lesson-time, but they knew very well it was not a sufficient one; for Elly had acted as their teacher more than once, and it was to be supposed that Isabel also was capable of doing so. Little did they guess that their sisters were feeling more guilty about the undone lessons than they did, and that it was not carelessness, but sorrow which prevented their speaking of them. The little fellows were afraid to remind Isabel of the promise she had made the day before; and when she unexpectedly offered to fulfil it, they fawned on her in rapture.

"You're going to the river with us? Oh, good Isa! Fine old girl!—Come on, Archy, and see if we've got enough—"

"Get what you want," said Isabel, interrupting him hastily; "only keep them out of my sight. Do you hear?"

They promised eagerly that she should see not a single worm—they would have promised anything to please her then—and off they flew to prepare their rods. In a wonderfully short time the whole party were following the tangled and troublesome path which the burn took on its way to the river; Jim and Archy, in honourable fulfilment of their pledge, keeping well in advance of their sisters, lest any of their doings or sayings might offend

Isabel's delicacy, or bring back unpleasant memories of the morning. They were as blithe as possible as they hurried along; but Isabel, leading Dolly behind them, sighed often, and answered the little queen's remarks in the most doleful tone. She made a full stop at last, and appealed piteously to Elly, who was eagerly stretching and straining to reach red rosebuds in the thorny thicket above her head. "I can scarcely walk myself, not to speak of pulling Bonnie!"

"Why, what's wrong with you?" asked Elly, putting her flowers hastily in her hat, and coming to take Dolly's hand.

"My limbs ache so!"

"You mean your legs, I suppose? Poor old thing! you should have stayed at home and rested, I think."

"Would it have been rest if I had stayed at home? I would have had to do the dinner-dishes; and it seems as if I had just finished the breakfast ones! Elly, you say you hope you'll never have to be a governess; I hope I'll never have to be a servant. I don't know *what* people can do in New Zealand and Australia, where they can't get any one to do the work for them."

"They must be badly off if they have no Loulous," said Elly.

Down by the river Isabel found rest enough for her body, if not for her spirit. The children made a halt just below the foot-bridge which led to the castle grounds, and there, on a sunny little shore of sand and pebbles, Isabel lay all the drowsy afternoon, while Elly and Dolly flitted hither and thither; and the boys, stepping easily on the great stones which rose high and dry out of the shallow summer water, fished patiently and unsuccessfully on. Among the woods on the other side—beyond the castle

and far away, probably—Loulou was filling her can with blaeberries all alone. Isabel was well pleased to keep the bridge in sight, that there might be no chance of her returning home unobserved; but all in vain did she strain her eyes to watch for the well-known little figure coming down the steep path opposite, which the fir-trees made so dark. The heart-sickness of hope deferred came over Isabel, along with a dreary foreboding of evil, such as she had never felt before. For her fifteen years had not robbed her of her happy childhood's privilege of unbelief in the reality of great calamities; and until now she had enjoyed a pleasant, unreasoning security that no very terrible sorrow could happen to her. But all evil things seemed suddenly to have become possible, since it had been proved that Loulou could not only let the sun go down upon her wrath, but allow it to rise again upon it in the morning.

Isabel had heard of mesmerism, and the power one human mind may have upon another, so now she gathered up all her mental forces and tried to *will* Loulou back again. Surely some chord in her sister's heart would answer to that passionate longing, and she would feel a mysterious impulse to take up her can and turn her steps homeward again. Come out of the far away woods, Loulou; you have got enough blaeberries now; your feet will go fast on the smooth gravel of the castle avenue. Pass the gardener with a nod, if you meet him—there is no need even of remarking on the weather; don't linger on the green to look at the round tower, and think of Queen Mary; cross the grass quickly, and hurry under the trees again. A few steps further, taken at a run down the steep incline, and you will catch a glimpse of your brothers and sisters waiting for you on the opposite bank. Isabel

is ready to meet you tenderly, and, forgetting her own weariness, will offer to carry your can; she will speak no word of past trouble; there will be nothing to remind you of yesterday's quarrel except special, though delicate, manifestations of your sister's love.

So Isabel traced Loulou's journey home, and assured her of her welcome, straining her imagination in a painful attempt at mesmeric influence; but though she nearly wept with longing when the critical moment came, and the little figure ought to have appeared above the bridge, her efforts were all in vain. Were those other horrible thoughts true, then? and was it possible Loulou *could* not return? Perhaps she had fallen and struck her head, or severely sprained her ankle, and was lying now in a deathly swoon, or in keen, conscious agony, unable to move, and far from help.

Nonsense! Mesmerism was a thing of naught, except possibly to a few peculiarly constituted minds; and doubtless Loulou knew nothing at all of her sister's silent struggles to summon her home. She must be finding so many blaeberries that she was unwilling to give up her work, — or else she was finding so few, that it took a very long time indeed to fill her can. After all, the hour for tea had not yet arrived; and was it to be expected that she would return before then? A day in the woods, as every one knows, does not end till late in the afternoon. But perhaps Isabel ought to go home now and make preparations for Loulou's coming. It seemed very uncertain, however, whether the younger ones would agree to any such proposal, for they all seemed to be enjoying themselves thoroughly where they were.

Elly was on her knees close to the water, splashing a refreshing shower upon her roses; while Dolly, seated on

a stone, was watching her gravely, and holding her own short dress high above the current in which her pretty bare feet were paddling. The little boys, farther down the river, were throwing their lines as enthusiastically as ever, and watching them with rapt attention. Isabel dared only to make her suggestion in the form of a question to Elly. "Don't you think Lou will be hungry by this time?"

The hint was taken. "I think she will," said Elly. "Blaeberries aren't substantial. I vote we go home and get tea."

"No, no!" shouted Jim. "Wait! I've got a bite! I feel him! Oh, he's a big one!"

He tugged and twitched his line, gently at first, and then more violently, while the others looked on in excitement. But his own face was white and set, and he was prepared for the worst, before they guessed that his hook was stuck fast—not in the jaws of any trout, but underneath the stones at the bottom of the river. When the line snapped at last, it was Archy who uttered a cry of grief; Jim fastened up his rod without a word, and walked off towards the manse. Sorry as she was for him, Isabel could not help feeling relieved that there could be no demand for more fishing that afternoon. She made haste to put on Dolly's socks and shoes, amusing her all the while with eager talk about what they were to do when they got home.

"We're going to have tea outside, and a table-cloth spread on the grass. Such fun as we shall have! And you'll be a little table-maid, Bonnie, and help to carry out the things. We'll make pats of butter in funny shapes, and we'll have some jam.—Don't you think we might have bread and butter and jam for once, Elly, as if it were

Sunday night? We've never had tea outside all this summer, though it has been such lovely weather. Very stupid of us, to be sure, wasn't it? But we'll have fine times to-night."

So she went on chattering, until she had succeeded, not only in pleasing the children, but driving away her own gloomy thoughts, and persuading herself that the housework she had hated so much in the morning might be made into pleasant play in the afternoon. As Loulou had stayed away so long, it was to be hoped she would stay a little longer, so that the feast might be all prepared before she came. Let her gather a few more blaeberries; or, if she was on her way home, let her walk slowly. She might ask after the gardener's family if she met him, and wait in front of the castle to fancy what it was like in the olden time. A little longer, Loulou; only stay away a little longer, until we are ready for you, and then—come home! Oh, come home!

CHAPTER X.

FORGIVING AND FORGIVEN.

"For there is no friend like a sister,
In calm or stormy weather;
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

A DAY of blaeberry-gathering was an annual festival in the Maitland family, and observed with due honour. Early some fine morning in July the children would set off for the woods, each bearing a can or basket, and all under the charge of Maggie, who would relax her gravity for the time-being, and condescend to join in their mirth. It was the custom to take dinner with them, and saunter home late in the afternoon, sunburned and heavy laden, with their lips and hands stained blue, giving occasion for an unfailing joke about their resemblance to ancient Britons. In the evening the frolic was resumed, when the elder children tried their skill in jam-making, and the younger ones hovered about the fire, ready to admire and to taste. The jars they filled were afterwards tied up and labelled by themselves, and then stowed away in a shelf of their own, to be brought out on birthdays or special feasts, when the toy tea-set was also in requisition.

It was with the full remembrance of all these pleasant ceremonies, which the elder ones kept up (as they said) for the sake of old times, and the younger ones enjoyed without need of excuse, that Loulou went through this dreary farce of holiday-making all alone. She knew that this first expedition of hers would take much of the charm from any after one that the others might make to the woods and the blaeberries; but she had decided, before her departure, that her sisters' and brothers' pleasure was none of her concern. The conviction that she was spoiling her own amusement as well as theirs did not force itself upon her so soon; but when it did, she made up her mind that did not matter either. If her solitary gipsying was almost as dull as her imprisonment in the spare bed-room had been, no one should ever know it but herself; and, meanwhile, she would get what satisfaction she could in gathering a great many blaeberries, and proving to Susan, who had laughed at the size of her can, that it was by no means too big after all. So, after a quick walk through the woods to a favourable spot for beginning her operations, Loulou set to work as if she were doing it for her bread. It was only when she began to realize that otherwise her task would be finished before she wished to return home that she allowed herself to rest now and then; lying flat under the fir-trees to watch the light dancing through their branches, or, oftener still—for Loulou loved the sun—choosing her couch on some patch of heather in a little clearing, where there was nothing above her but the blue sky.

It was impossible to keep from thinking at those times, and fancy drew a vivid picture of her mother's face, with eyes turned sadly away from the towering Alps and the green Swiss valleys, looking in troubled yearning and disappointment towards the home where her little daughter

had quarrelled with her companions, and deserted her post. She imagined Isabel and Elly, too, reading Motley without her, and passing hastily over the allusions to Count Louis of Nassau, which ought to have made his listening namesake look self-conscious and gratified. She remembered with a pang that Dolly's inexperienced fingers would find some difficulty with the buttons and strings of Dollibella's new garments, when there was no Loulou to appeal to for help or explanation.

With all these considerations she strove to deal in the same determined fashion as she had behaved since she left the dining-room the day before. It was absurd, she said, morbid, worthy of Isabel herself, even to think of her mother in a foreign country guessing what happened in Scotland, and grieving over troubles which no one had ever told her of. As for her sisters, if they missed her, that was exactly what Loulou had hoped they would do, and only what they deserved. Isabel had driven her away, and not one of the children had made the least protest. "Let them reap as they have sown," said Loulou tragically. But somehow these thoughts were difficult to banish; and there were others which were harder still to deal with: memories of divine love and forgiveness, of the patient meekness of the Son of God. In the silent woods a Voice spoke to Loulou's heart, using the familiar words of Bible texts she had often repeated on Sunday afternoons, proud of the precision of memory and glibness of tongue which were so superior to her sister's.

Be ye kind one to another.

"But Isabel isn't kind to me," said Loulou defiantly. "For weeks she has carped at me, nagged at me, sighed at me; done all sorts of things to vex me. At last she insulted me before Archy. Could I bear that?"

Charity suffereth long, said the Voice—*envieth not—seeketh not her own—is not easily provoked—beareth all things*—

"There never was a more uncharitable girl than Isabel, then. Her behaviour goes against all these texts." And Loulou sprang up, and began seeking blaeberries again with sudden energy; but no thoughts of her work could drown the answer which came, solemn and clear, to her last complaint:—

If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? But I say unto you, Love your enemies.

"I know!" said Loulou. "Saints may be able to do that. Martyrs may be able to do that,—people in memoirs, perhaps. I can't." Her wrongs seemed all to come to her mind with renewed keenness; she burst into tears, and a tempest swept over her spirit, as in the first minutes of her anger yesterday. But in the first lull of the furious storm within, there was heard the sound of the still small Voice, speaking words of saddest meaning,—

If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.

And Loulou sobbed, and answered not.

Thus the blessed Holy Spirit strove long with the little girl in her pride, speaking to her whenever she would hear, waiting beside her all the day. And as the hours went slowly on, Loulou's anger died away, and sadness filled her heart instead. She would have given almost anything if she could have blotted out the last two days of her life, and returned to be with her sisters as she was before.

She was very tired both in body and mind,—tired with much walking, and with passionate thought. Her wanderings had led her further into the woods than she had ever been before, and the unfamiliar places struck her with a sense of dreary loneliness. Oh, how she longed for the

old home life, Isabel's stories, and Elly's jokes, and the children's games again! But she did not know how to descend from the pinnacle of sulkiness on which she had set herself. Must she sacrifice her own dignity, and return where she had been told she was not wanted? Must she retract her own words, and resume the work she had said she gave up for ever? At times she felt ready to do these things, at other times they seemed impossible. All afternoon she debated the point wearily.

She was so tired at last that she could think no more. The keen words with which she had described her wrongs, and argued the propriety of the part she had taken were gone from her; she was conscious of nothing but a dull heartache. Slowly she retraced her steps back to well-known paths, and followed the very way Isabel had imagined her coming, though she felt no instinctive knowledge of her sister's longing fancies. There was no one watching for her at the bridge; the children had all gone home some time ago. Loulou crossed the river and climbed wearily up the opposite hill all alone in the late afternoon. The first sight of the manse and church, nestling snugly among the garden trees, brought tears to her eyes, as if she were returning after an absence of years; but there was no joy in her heart. She felt desolate, forsaken, miserable. At that moment the chances were pretty equal, whether she would fall on her sister's neck when they met, or turn coldly and silently away from her.

Coming along the burn side to the gate, Loulou heard the voices of her brothers and sisters sounding merrily in the garden. She could not see through the thick fir-hedge, but they seemed to be jumping and running hither and thither; the boys were shouting and whistling, and as an under-current to their noise, there came Isabel's softer talk.

broken by ripples of laughter from Elly and Dolly. "And this is how they have been going on all day," said Loulou to herself with a sudden spark of rekindled anger in her breast. All her home-sickness and loneliness in the woods appeared humiliating weakness, the consciousness of which stung her now sharply, when she thought that the others had all been happy in her absence. Isabel's bitter words were true, then, and they could get on better without her. It was only Loulou herself who was foolish enough to pine for a reconciliation.

Ah! if she had only known how she had been missed, and longed for, and watched for, and that this joyous outburst was but a reaction from the dulness of the day, expending itself in preparations for her welcome!

Dandy made his way through the hedge, and was received with joyful exclamations; and then the voices died down into excited whispers, and Loulou understood that her approach was known. Elly met her at the gate, her eyes shining, and mirth playing in the very waves of her backward-flowing hair. "Come in, Count Louis, and you shall see what you shall see!" Loulou followed her, dusty and heavy-laden, wearing a white, set look on her face. She spoke never a word, but again she heard the Voice which had come to her at intervals all afternoon, saying in tender, solemn accents, "Forgive!"

Proudly Elly led the way to the green, where Isabel was waiting more in anxiety than triumph. Her faith in the success of her plans was not so strong now that the testing moment had arrived. The table-cloth was spread on the grass, and all adorned with flowers; every plate, too, had a neat little nosegay of its own. Special dainties had been brought out in honour of the occasion, and everything was set out with the greatest care to produce as gay and unusual

an appearance as possible. But to Loulou the whole arrangement seemed only a premeditated insult. Isabel wished to show that she could not only carry on the household work without her help, but turn it into a fête. That was the charming elder sister all over!

Loulou stood just long enough to take in all the details of the scene; then she turned and walked quickly into the house, and straight up to the spare bed-room. When Elly recovered sufficiently from her surprise to follow her, she found the can of blaeberries at the foot of the stair, and the door above locked upon a silence as absolute as had baffled Isabel's efforts yesterday. She came back in tears to tell the news, for she was beginning to think it possible that Loulou meant to separate herself from them all until her parents' return—a state of things that was simply too awful to contemplate.

The same idea had occurred to Isabel, and naturally aroused her indignation as well as her sorrow. She had found it difficult to excuse Loulou's conduct yesterday, when there was no doubt she had some provocation; and she found it doubly difficult now, when there was no doubt she had none. It was true Isabel had prepared her feast with a little of that feeling that she was a "charming elder sister" Loulou had suspected her of. She had been proud of keeping the little ones happily employed, and was conscious of her own generosity in thus warmly receiving the erring one back again. But in spite of all her small affectations, she had been prompted by true love for her sister, and an honest desire to please her. It never even entered her mind that Loulou might have mistaken the meaning of her demonstration.

"She is unkind, very unkind," she said bitterly to Elly. "And we have taken all this trouble for her! No, there

is no use of me, or any one else, going to ask her to come out. She won't do it."

But the little ones sent shouts and showers of gravel up to the spare bed-room windows to summon Loulou, feeling it incredible that, after a day in the woods, she should refuse to come to tea. When the truth of the fact was forced upon them at last, they condemned her folly loudly, and then clamoured about their own hunger. At last the children sat down to the meal they had prepared so merrily, but all the special flavour had gone out of it; it was in no way different from tea in the dining-room, except in being not nearly so comfortable.

Then there followed another dreary evening, with a painful resemblance to that of yesterday. Isabel, leaving the nursery after she had put the little ones to bed, wondered whether she had to go through two weeks of such evenings yet, and how long it would take to get accustomed to them. She felt so tired and dispirited that going downstairs seemed a great exertion; and leaning her elbows on the banisters, she stared vacantly down into the lobby below. With profound self-pity she began to recall the events of the afternoon, dwelling tenderly on her own longings for her sister and preparations for her return, and waxing indignant as she remembered how Loulou came to show herself only that she might testify her contempt for them all. It was in the midst of these reflections that Isabel's ear was caught by another sound, distinct from the cooing murmur with which Dolly was singing herself and Dollibella to sleep. She raised her head in attention, and a change came over her face. All at once Isabel forgot herself and her injured dignity, her pathetic humility, and her unrewarded generosity. Loulou was sobbing in the spare bed-room; and the knowledge of her distress brought

a sudden revulsion of feeling towards her, which drove everything else out of her sister's mind. Isabel's vision of Loulou changed; it was no longer the offended little vixen leaving the dining-room with clenched hands and a white face of fury, or the dusty traveller turning away with deliberate scorn from the welcome offered to her: it was the little figure that had met her at the station on her return from school—an eager child, with lights like stars in her eyes, and dancing steps, that had lost none of their elasticity because she had walked five long miles to greet her sister a little sooner. This was the true Loulou, and it was she who was crying so hopelessly all alone.

Isabel ran downstairs with rapid, noiseless steps, and snatched the pen from Elly, who was chronicling the future fortunes of the Maitland family, and groaning as if they were not very good. "Come back to us, Louly," wrote Isabel hastily; "we can't do without you—we are miserable without you. I was a fool to say what I did;—I am very sorry. I will do anything you like if you only won't stay away. I beseech you, forgive and come back to us!" She flew up again, and thrust her scrap of paper under the spare bed-room door.

Thus it was that Loulou triumphed, and received the most complete and humble apology that even she could have wished. Do you think it was worth all the trouble of the last few days,—the wild anger and persistent sullenness, the dreary self-imprisonment and exile? I doubt whether Loulou herself felt it so, as she read it with tear-dimmed eyes, still sitting in her dusty dress, weary and hungry and sad, on the floor of the lonely room.

Isabel and Elly, listening eagerly downstairs, exchanged delighted glances as the unlocking of the door was heard, and were not dismayed when Loulou went straight from

her prison to her own chamber, for they rightly guessed that the instinct of tidiness would make her wish to appear before them with smooth hair and stainless hands. But when she entered the dining-room at last, they dared not lift their heads to look at her: in dead silence she took a seat at the front window, and brought out her work-box. Elly, divining that the other two would be best alone, gathered up her papers and went away. Then Isabel crossed the room and took Loulou's hand in hers. It was not drawn away, but remained limp and unresponsive to any clasp. "Louly," said Isabel gently, "why didn't you tell me that it was because Archy brought his worms in here that you threw them away?"

"What right had you to suppose I'd do it just to spite him?" was the question flung back at her.

"Well, I beg your pardon for that, then," said Isabel after a pause, during which she had been trying to consider her sister's view of the matter. "I beg your pardon; but I think you might have explained. I dare say you'll think I was rightly punished when I tell you I found the worms on the sideboard this morning, and upset them all over myself. I would much rather have thrown them as you did, I confess."

Loulou laughed hysterically; but Isabel only shuddered, for the adventure of the morning was still horrible, not ludicrous, to her. "It made me feel quite sick," said she. "I didn't get over it for hours. I can't bear to think of it even now."

Loulou recovered her gravity after a moment, and remarked in a somewhat bitter tone, "Then you were not so gay and festive in the morning as you were afterwards?"

"Gay and festive! What *do* you mean?"

"Exactly what I say," said Loulou. "Feasts and flowers. All to show how prettily you could manage things, and how happy you could make everybody when I was out of the way."

"Loulou, Loulou!" cried Isabel, greatly distressed; "*how* you misunderstand! Why, that very feast was planned to make things pleasant for you when you came back, and let you know how glad we were to see you, without bothering you by saying it all in words. My poor little plan! What a failure it has been! You see I thought formal 'makings-up' were such tiresome things."

"That was it, was it?" said Loulou, considerably mollified.

"Yes, indeed. Ah, you would never talk about this day being 'gay and festive' if you only knew how long and uncomfortable and dismal it's been!"

"You didn't like doing the work after all, I suppose," said Loulou with a little smile.

"Oh, don't be sarcastic! It wasn't the work. That was bad enough, to be sure,—just wait till you see the beds! But we wanted you—you, yourself. You can't think how I missed you, Louly."

"You had only yourself to blame, then," said Loulou. "You said I had been a hindrance to you ever since mamma left!"

"I know, I know. I told you I was foolish. How many 'Beg pardons' do you want me to say?"

Loulou made no answer, but stared fixedly out of the window with a cold, hard look on her face, which made her sadly unlike the bright-eyed loving girl who had welcomed Isabel at the station in spring. Her sister hesitated before she spoke again; it seemed almost hopeless to plead more. "I was foolish, I was unjust," she said at

last; "I know, and I'm sorry. But, Loulou, as we're having it out, it's best to say everything. I don't think I would have behaved so ill to you if you hadn't made me angry before. I felt you weren't nice to me about papa and mamma going away. You knew it was for their good, and that I was undertaking a great responsibility, and that it was no pleasure to me. Well, I think you might have stood by me, Loulou."

"You never asked me to stand by you," said Loulou, suddenly turning round upon her sister, and speaking with an energy that startled her; "you never asked me to stand by you, any more than you asked Dolly! But I did it all the same. You made the fine speeches, and I did the work. You made it as hard for me as you could. You took the children's part against me; you took Elly away from me. You sent Maggie home without a word to me, though I was to be housemaid, of course, when she was away. But still I held my tongue and did the work. I stood by you till you drove me away!"

Isabel had fallen back a step or two as Loulou spoke, and was gazing at her with an expression of bewilderment. "You're making me out a perfect wretch!" said she.

"Call yourself what names you please," was the answer; "I tell you facts."

"But you make me out so unkind," said Isabel, still greatly perplexed; "and I don't think it's my nature to be unkind to any one?" She put an accent of interrogation into her last words; but Loulou, staring blankly out of the window, drummed with her fingers on the sill, and made no reply. Isabel was left to make what use she could of the new and unpleasant light which had been thrown on her own character, as well as her sister's, by the events of the last few days.

"But this is terrible!" said she at last. "It has been one long misunderstanding, then, since mother went. You have been angry with me because you thought I slighted you, and I have been angry because I thought you cold-hearted; and we've both been jealous of each other. It would have been better if we had quarrelled outright long ago. Then, at least, we would have found out where we were. But this keeping up secret grudges is horrible. It didn't use to be this way between us."

"No, not till you went to school, and came home and despised me," said Loulou vehemently.

"My dear girl, I *never* did such a thing."

"You did! You were always telling me how the girls at Miss Martyn's would think me vulgar, and stupid, and countrified, and how they would laugh at my French and my playing."

"Now, Loulou, it was quite the other way, for you often hurt my feelings by the way you used to speak about my school friends—"

"In self-defence, because you were always holding them up as patterns. Then you kept away from me, and read Elly the long letters you got from the girls you like better than me."

"Loulou! Loulou!" said Isabel, "you don't know what nonsense you are talking! I read my letters to Elly because I thought you did not care to hear them, or that you would only want to scoff. And as for liking the other girls better than you—friends are awfully nice, of course, and I *did* love some of them at school; but, don't you know, there's no one else in the world can be like a sister? Why, I thought of you more than of any one else when I was away. Ellen Murray once said that she was sick of hearing me talk about you."

"Rude girl she must be," observed Loulou, who was nevertheless better pleased with this remark of her sister's school-fellow than with any of Isabel's representations.

"And I never imagined you cared when I scolded you," said Isabel. "I really never thought you minded." She was divided between compunction and pride at the thought that Loulou valued her opinion. Compunction gaining the victory, she added, after a little, "Did you never think I admired you?"

"Admired me! No, certainly not."

"Ah, but I do. There isn't a girl at Miss Martyn's has a prettier figure, or holds herself better than you. And do you think I never wish I were like you? Wouldn't I like to have a knack of doing things tidily, and keeping my clothes right, and have things go nicely under my fingers without any trouble, as they do with you? Do you think I never wish I had smooth plaits that never came unfastened? and that my collars wouldn't get so soon rumpled? Don't I wish I could sew like you, and help mamma with the children's clothes, and knit stockings with the intakes all right in them, as you can do any day of your life?"

"And do you think," said Loulou, taking the words out of her mouth—"do you really think I never wish to be tall, and have a proper sort of a nose? Don't you think I wish I had been at school, and had had masters, and got to understand French when it was spoken? Do you think I never want to get letters from the post—great long sheets of them? Do you think I wouldn't like to have friends as well as you? And don't you think I would give anything to be able to make long stories—not priggish, anecdoty things—but regular, long, good ones, with characters and adventures in them, like yours and Elly's?"

After these outbursts, the two girls, being out of breath, stood looking at each other in silence, as if doubtful whether they had been wise or not in thus opening up their hearts, and feeling somewhat uncertain what to do next. And while each waited for the other to speak, Susan came in with the supper-tray, and Isabel and Loulou fell apart and busied themselves about the room, in a vain endeavour to look unembarrassed. When she was gone, Elly appeared, and brought the Bibles to the table, making Isabel say remorsefully, "We had no worship this morning; the children ran away, and I forgot."

"So did I," said Elly. "It was awfully wrong."

Loulou took no notice of these confessions. She sat in her place with the others, but her Bible remained unopened, and her head rested on her hand. It seemed to her that she had no right to read the Word of God with lips that had as yet spoken no love to her sister. The others waited for her in silence: Isabel afraid that anything she would say might rouse her anger again; Elly wondering much what had passed while she was out of the room, and whether her sisters were yet reconciled.

Suddenly Loulou slipped from her seat to the floor, and flung her arms about Isabel. "Forgive me!" she said, the words almost choked in a great burst of crying. Isabel laid her head on her shoulder, and the two clung together as if nothing would ever part them more, while Elly wept for sympathy. "Let us say, 'Our Father,'" whispered Isabel after a little; and the girls who had quarrelled knelt side by side, and repeated the Lord's Prayer with hands clasped fast in each other's, and voices that faltered through tears when they came to the petition that they might be forgiven as they forgave. At the end

they turned and kissed each other gravely, as if they were sealing a covenant.

So after that long and stormy day there was peace in the evening—a peace that became almost brightness before they went to sleep. For Loulou only went into the nursery to return again immediately with a large white bundle in her arms; and deposited Dolly, soft and warm and sound asleep, on one of the beds in the girls' room.

"You go with Isa to-night, Elly, and Totty and I will be very cosy together in your bed."

"Dear little roly-poly!" said Elly. "Won't she be astonished when she wakens up and finds herself here! —Now then, Isa."

And well pleased to relax the strain which had been on their minds all day, the three girls undressed, and went to bed, and fell asleep, under the soothing influence of a somewhat uneventful Fitzclarence story.

CHAPTER XI.

AN INOPPORTUNE ARRIVAL.

"But, mousie, thou art no thy lane
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft a-gley."

BURNS.

AFTER those days, Isabel and Loulou Maitland went very softly for a time. To each had been given a new revelation of her own nature and her sister's, which proved no unprofitable subject for thought. Isabel had found out that, in spite of her gentleness, she had been tyrannical; in spite of her humility, she had been presumptuous and self-conceited; in spite of all her powers of imagination, she had been unable to understand the feelings of the one being in all the world she ought to have known the best. It was a sad time for Isabel when she came to see that she had been living for weeks in self-deception, blaming her sister for the evils whose guilt lay principally at her own door. Henceforth she began to pray with a new comprehension of the meaning of the words, "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults."

With Loulou it was different. Sorely provoked as she had been, she had never blinded herself to the fact that, whatever Isabel's conduct might be, her own was wicked.

She had determinedly hardened her heart against the voice of her sisters, and another Voice which she had never heard so distinctly before. When Loulou became broken in spirit and contrite at last, she had to look back upon herself—not only as passionate and resentful when unkindly used, but as proud and scornful to Isabel in her repentance—a girl who had shown herself harsh and unloving, and terribly slow to forgive. Such a picture was not pleasant to contemplate.

So it came to pass that Isabel and Loulou were very meek after this quarrel of theirs, and very kind to each other, with a deprecatory sort of affection which took characteristic forms with them both. Isabel appealed to Loulou for her opinion on every possible occasion, and often wistfully watched her to guess what she was thinking; and Loulou, however busy she might be, was ever eager to offer her sister those little services, the performance of which she had seemed to grudge a good deal of late.

But the girls found that their sin had done harm to others as well as themselves, and the consequences were not easy to repair. The difference between them had put the household out of tune, and it took some time to bring it into harmony again. Susan had been bitterly disappointed in her young mistresses—especially in Miss Loulou, whose good sense and skill in housekeeping she had been wont to boast of. When Maggie went away, Susan had cheerfully taken up the extra burden of work that had fallen upon her in the washing-week; but then she had expected that the girls would support her. Instead of that, Isabel and Elly had blundered over or neglected their household work in alternate awkwardness and carelessness; while Loulou went off to the woods for a whole

day, exactly as if there had been nothing particular to do at home. Therefore Susan felt herself justified in being sulky and impatient, and going about her work in an aggrieved fashion that was very unusual with her.

But the mischief done to Susan, which resulted chiefly in making the kitchen very uncomfortable for the girls for a few days, was as nothing to the mischief done to the boys. Isabel and Loulou had stood for the time being in the place of their parents, and respect and obedience had been yielded them accordingly. But they had undermined each other's influence, and spent their energies in mutual annoyance: Isabel had set up a court of appeal against Loulou's judgments; and Loulou, in passionate indignation, had flung her duties and responsibilities to the winds. All this the little fellows had observed with keen interest and amusement, though they knew nothing of the sorrow and tenderness with which the sisters had acknowledged their wrong-doing at last, and begged for pardon.

Moreover, while Isabel and Loulou were showing such examples of foolish, hasty anger, and long continued, obstinate ill-temper, as had never been seen in the Abbotsmuir Manse before, the little ones were allowed a freedom from restraint which in itself was sufficiently perilous. Jim and Archy had ventured to disobey their mother's commands (as in the matter of the worms), and they had done so with impunity; they had played truant from their lessons, unpursued, unpunished, and even unreproved; they had come in once and again dirty and untidy to meals, and no one had sent them away. It was no wonder, therefore, that when Isabel and Loulou returned to their duties they found them twice as difficult as before. They might refuse to hear complaints of each other, they might try to be patient and diligent in new humility and unity, but the

moral force which their superior age and good behaviour had formerly given them was seriously diminished.

To Elly also her sisters had wrought evil, though not in the same manner as to the little ones. The quarrel between Isabel and Loulou caused her only shame and sorrow, and during the scene of reconciliation afterwards, she had been scarcely less moved than the actors themselves. The loss that was Elly's came chiefly through Isabel, though Loulou had to do with it too. The precious conversations about sacred things ceased for a while. It was not only that Isabel was anxious to avoid vexing Loulou by going off alone with Elly, but she now felt herself hopelessly unfit to give her little sister help at all. How could she any longer incite another to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ by telling of brave battles fought, and the joy of victories won? She had been untrue to her own colours; she had, as it were, lain down to sleep on the battle-field, and let the legions of selfishness and egotism take unresisted possession of her heart. She had, indeed, been roused, and had risen at last, but her waking-up was to a consciousness of defeat and shame.

Thus the third week of Mr. and Mrs. Maitland's absence rolled on, and that it did so without any particular disaster was only owing to the steadiness of Isabel and Loulou, who bore themselves with a gravity hitherto unknown. The days were long, but Saturday came round at last, bringing with it the responsibility of preparation for the entertainment of another preacher.

"You must help me with this one, Louly," said Isabel, faithful to her new rôle of consideration for her sister.

"You did very well with the last one yourself," said Loulou.

"Oh, but that was a peculiar case! It isn't likely that

another one will care to talk about Schiller and Goethe, and the masters at Miss Martyn's; and I can't talk churchy talk. He won't come till the last train, I hope?"

"Not he," said Loulou, decidedly. "Probationers never leave town till the afternoon. He'll come here about ten o'clock, in time for supper, and he'll get eggs and cold beef. Only he must cut the beef neatly, because it's for to-morrow's dinner."

"I should just like to hear you tell him that!"

"Well, perhaps it would be safer not to have the beef in to-night at all; I couldn't bear to see it hacked; and eggs are enough for any man's supper. You must ask him his name, Isa."

"Oh no, I couldn't," said Isabel shuddering; "how could I?"

"Quite easily," cried Elly, her eyes kindling with the delight an absurd idea always gave her. "Whenever he comes in at the door, make him a fine bow or a sweeping courtesy, and say, 'The Rev. Mr. Smith, I presume?'"

"Nonsense!" said Isabel, laughing. "I shall just call him Mister all the time, unless he gives me a name, of his own accord, to put at the end of it. But what shall we talk about?"

"I'll tell you," said Loulou; "I know their ways; mother and I used to entertain probationers last winter when you were away. I'll tell you what will happen. We'll send the little ones to bed, and you and I will be waiting in the dining-room, with the lamp lighted, to receive him. First, he'll ask how far it is from here to the station. Five miles by the road, say we; there are some short cuts through the woods, but they're difficult for strangers to find, and boggy in wet weather. Then

he'll probably say that the miles in this part of the country are long; and we must laugh at his little joke. Then we'll ask him if he came up this side of the river, or whether he came round by the castle, and crossed the wooden bridge."

"I hope he'll come by the castle, because that would be something to talk about."

"We must get it in anyhow," said Loulou. "We can't do without it. It's a grand subject. He'll ask who it belongs to, and then whether it has been in the Mackenzie family for long."

"And what will you say to that?"

"A long time," said Loulou loftily, "but *not* from time immemorial. It was an abbey once, but was taken possession of by some lawless noble. Shall I call him sacrilegious?"

"No, I think not. Better not. He might think you meant it."

"And I don't think I should tell him Mrs. Leslie's famous story about the Miss Mackenzie that travelled in the country of the cannibals? It's a pity to spend good stories where they aren't appreciated."

"Of course. And will you tell him that the castle ghost is a black pig, and not a monk with a cowl, as it ought to be?"

"I'm not sure," said Loulou, reflectively. "I think it must depend on what sort of man he is. Suppose he thought it necessary to tell us there was no such thing as ghosts!"

"Then I'll leave the black pig to you," said Isabel, "and you can bring it in or not as you think proper."

"Very well. But we'll tell about Mary Queen of Scots having slept a night in the castle; and *we* must make a

little joke about Queen Mary having seldom slept at home, if all the stories are true of the places where she spent a night. Will *you* do that, Isa? And notice how he takes the joke; a great deal depends upon that. We might even tell the other things, if he seemed amused."

"Then what next?" asked Elly, who, as well as Isabel, was much interested in this prophetical conversation.

"Then he'll ask who lives at the castle just now. The gamekeeper's family in winter, say we. Their name is Leslie, and they belong to papa's congregation (probationers like to hear what church people go to); but in summer it is generally let to English people, and they generally come to our church too. Then my probationer will prick up his ears, thinking all sorts of grand ladies and gentlemen are coming to hear *him;* but we'll dash his joy when we tell him they never come north till August."

"Lou, you're an impudent creature," said Elly with sisterly politeness. "What would papa say if he heard you?"

Loulou looked rather crestfallen for a moment, and Isabel hastened to her rescue. "Is that all?" said she. "Will supper be done by that time?"

"Oh yes!" said Loulou, recovering her animation. "Of course we must spin all that out, and it will last quite long enough. Then, immediately as he has done eating, you must ask him to have prayers. After that, I'll see that there is a lamp in the study, and a candle for his bed-room; and you'll tell him he can either go straight to bed or sit up for a while and read, just as he likes. But we'll say good-night and go off; and then our duty is done till next morning at breakfast. Everything will be easily managed, you'll see."

After this conversation the girls felt more like themselves than they had done for a week. The constraint, which had been first of ill-humour and then of excessive tenderness, wore off completely under the influence of a little nonsense about a subject of such general interest as the coming probationer. And once the scale was turned, they were all ready enough for something more to counterbalance the gravity of the past days.

They took their pleasure innocently enough, however, that Saturday afternoon. A fit of romping came upon the girls, and they went to the garden and played hide-and-seek with the little ones. Susan, coming to seek for her young mistresses at tea-time, was hailed by Loulou from the midst of a tree before the church door, where she sat, like King Charles of old, and surveyed her pursuers through the leafy branches.

"Am I to go for the butter to-night, or will some of you?" asked Susan.

"*I* don't want to go.—What do you say, Isabel?" said Loulou, as her sister appeared on the scene below.

"Oh, you're there, are you? I've been looking for you everywhere. Dear me! I'm so tired with running, I could no more walk two miles than I could fly. Perhaps Jim—"

"But Susan's the girl for getting fowls from the old lady," said Loulou, beginning to descend. "She'll never sell me any; she always says she has none to spare, though I see dozens cackling and strutting about. But Susan can come round her somehow.—We're not going to play any more, Jim; we're going in to tea.—No, no; I'm not caught," she added, as the children flew to clutch her as she reached the ground.

When Susan had returned to the house, Loulou observed, in an aside to her sisters:—

"Jack Scott is what Aunt Annie would call an 'eligible young man.' Susan likes to go to Craigfoot for the butter."

"And we don't," said Elly; "could anything be more suitable?—Let us have some charades after tea."

The proposal was received with acclamations, and the meal hurried over in consequence. Everybody wanted to act except Isabel, who was too self-conscious; which was perhaps a fortunate thing, as otherwise there would have been no spectator. The children flew hither and thither, in great excitement and delight—planning, dressing, and rehearsing their parts; and the fun reached its climax when the whole word—*Marriage*—was represented, with more regard to theatrical effect than Presbyterian customs. Jim appeared first in the dining-room, wearing a long black cloak intended for a Geneva gown, a little black cap, and clerical bands. When he had placed himself in the middle of the floor in an attitude of expectancy, the door opened, and the bridegroom and bride entered: Loulou making a rather disreputable-looking man, in a very old greatcoat of her father's, with her hair tucked into the crown of a battered hat; and Elly, completely covered with white, having one muslin petticoat fastened over her head and another round her waist. The couple were followed by Archy and Dolly, walking hand-in-hand, and dressed as bridesmaids in long white night-gowns, girt with coloured scarfs.

At first sight of this singular procession, the cheeks of the clergyman became swollen in an alarming manner; but recovering himself almost immediately, he began to perform the ceremony by saying, in a loud and distinct voice—"Marry, come up!"

Thereupon the bride and bridegroom stepped briskly

forward, and, without more ado, proceeded to utter their vows.

The Bridegroom—"I, Louis, take thee, Eleanora, for richer, for poorer; for better, for worse."

The Bride (*in a deep voice, and with great solemnity*)—"I pronounce the irrevocable *I will!*"

The Bridegroom (*producing a pink circlet of paper, which had evidently been used to confine a packet of envelopes*)—"With this ring I thee wed."

The Bride (*with sudden animation*)–"I promise to love, honour, and obey a man whom *I despise!*"

At this juncture, when Isabel had just sunk back on the sofa in convulsions of merriment, the open doorway was suddenly filled by the figure of a very tall man. His complexion was dark, he wore a stubbly beard, and in his hand he carried a shiny black bag.

"This is Mr. Maitland's manse, I suppose?" he asked, in a stern voice, as the astonished children turned round upon him.

Then Loulou knew exactly what had happened, and, quick as thought, darted past the stranger and out of the room. The rest of the wedding party followed her more slowly; Elly groping her way to the door, and Archy and Dolly tripping on each other's dresses, and tumbling over at last in the lobby with screams of laughter. Isabel alone stood her ground, holding the end of the sofa with one hand, and awkwardly trying to push back her loose hair with the other.

"You can't see Mr. Maitland," she said, bewildered and indignant; "he's not at home."

"I am aware of that," said the stranger; "I am to preach for him to-morrow. My name is Mr. Booth."

He seated himself in an arm-chair, and began slowly

striking his clenched right hand against the open palm of his left, while he held his chin in the air, and stared straight before him into vacancy, with an expression of intense disapproval on his face.

Isabel, understanding at last that this was the probationer, and too much startled to be shy, exclaimed, in a voice of dismay and disappointment, "We never expected you till the last train."

"Hearing that the station was at a considerable distance from the manse," said Mr. Booth, continuing his occupation, and not looking at Isabel, "I thought it best to leave town early in the afternoon."

Isabel's feelings towards Mr. Booth's informant were anything but kindly; but feeling the necessity of keeping them to herself for the present, she murmured something about getting tea, and made her escape. When she arrived in the kitchen, her bewilderment and annoyance were increased by finding the fire almost out, and the unwashed tea-things piled upon the table—Loulou having been for once overcome by the temptation to put play before work.

Isabel gazed around her helplessly for a minute, and then, with the courage of despair, she seized her enemy, the big kettle, and deposited it safely upon the coals. Panting with excitement and relief, she fell back a little to observe the effect; but her satisfaction was soon damped by the fear that the weight she had put upon the faintly glowing embers would speedily crush out all the life that was in them.

She was sorrowfully considering this possibility when Elly appeared in her usual dress; and as their eyes met, both sisters burst into uncontrollable laughter. The recollection of the ridiculous scene they had just gone through

proved stronger than their present feelings of perplexity and discomfiture, and for some time neither could speak. At last Isabel managed to gasp out an inquiry about Loulou.

"She's coming," said Elly, through her laughter. "But her hair was all down, and most of her own clothes were off."

Of course, the news of her sister's condition only increased Isabel's mirth. But the next piece of information that Elly managed to give was scarcely so amusing.

"Loulou says there's not a bit of butter left."

"Oh, horrors!" exclaimed Isabel, earnestly enough; and then she and Elly fell a-laughing again.

Isabel recovered herself first, and immediately began to reprove her sister. "Stop it; he'll hear you. His name is Mr. Booth; he told me so himself—Mister and all. Be quiet, Elly."

"Why didn't he ring?"

"Boil, kettle, boil!" said Isabel, poking vigorously at the rapidly blackening coals. "He did ring, I suppose; but we didn't hear him in the dining-room.—No butter!" (Here followed a hysterical giggle.)—"Elly, I thought he was some one wanting papa, and I told him that he wasn't at home." (Renewed giggling.)—"Dear kettle, boil! Dear, sweet, *pretty* kettle, boil! boil! boil!"

But the kettle paid no heed to Isabel's tender words; and whether any boiling water was to be procured at all seemed exceedingly doubtful, until Loulou took the matter in hand. She came to the kitchen at last, almost as neat as usual in her attire; and, indeed, had taken a very short time in making herself so, considering all that had to be done.

After the inevitable burst of laughter when the sisters

first met, she fell to work with her usual energy and success. The obstinate kettle was forced to empty some of its contents into a smaller one, and then pushed contemptuously aside, while its substitute was set in the midst of the fire-place, with some sticks underneath to make a rapid blaze. At Loulou's suggestion, Isabel doled out fresh supplies of jam and tea; while Elly was sent to the garden to disrobe the younger children, who were still dancing about in their theatrical dresses.

But when a tray was neatly prepared, with Mr. Booth's tea upon it, a new difficulty appeared. Neither of the girls was inclined to act as table-maid. Isabel declared that she felt so nervous she would certainly let everything fall; and Loulou, who had never known before what shyness was, had been so mortified at being discovered in her masculine attire that she shrank from returning to the dining-room again. It was to no purpose that Isabel assured her that Mr. Booth had not time to observe the features of the disreputable bridegroom, and would never recognize him again in the dainty little damsel who was preparing refreshments so skilfully. Loulou was obstinate, and the discussion was only brought to an end at last by a loud peal from the dining-room bell. Isabel turned pale, and stared blankly at her sister, who, spoon in hand, was watching over the boiling egg-pan. Loulou flamed up into sudden indignation.

"Impudence!" said she, stamping her foot, and grimacing upwards at the swinging bell, as if it were in fault. "You'll get your tea, Mr. Booth, when *we're* ready; not a moment sooner, though you bring the house down with your noise."

Even as she spoke, Elly came running in breathless, to say that the children defied her attempts to catch them,

and had all gone off, dressed as they were, to the burnside. Then Loulou, with an expression of countenance which boded ill to the refractory younger members, whisked the eggs out of the pan, and, without another word, disappeared through the back-door. And again the dining-room bell pealed loudly.

Isabel seized Elly by the shoulders, and pushed her along the passage, bidding her tell Mr. Booth that he would get his tea immediately. But it turned out that he wished to be shown to his room — surely not an unreasonable request in the circumstances, though the possibility of it had never occurred to his entertainers. Isabel, listening behind the open kitchen door, heard Elly go upstairs before him struggling ineffectually with her laughter, and come down again completely overcome by it. In the small, badly-deafened house, sounds were inconveniently distinct; and there was little doubt that Mr. Booth in the spare bed-room heard this last outburst of merriment, as he had heard others before.

But Isabel had no time to scold her little sister, even if she had felt disposed to do so. She had to carry the tray to the dining-room, and try to make things tidy there in Mr. Booth's absence; and when she heard the door upstairs open, she fled back to the kitchen again. She felt unable to make polite conversation for her visitor — about Mary Queen of Scots, and the castle, and the walk from the station. And yet, as she stood alone by the kitchen fire, it occurred to her painfully that she was not doing her duty as mistress of the house, or proving herself, by self-possession and ladylike manners, a worthy pupil of the great Miss Maria Martyn.

Her sober mood was, however, speedily dispelled by the appearance of Loulou, who flung the garments she had

recovered upon a chair in the kitchen, and called out to her sister—"Come, quick! out of the house before he rings for butter!"

So again the absurd side of things came uppermost; and off they went, Elly joining them as they got out of the house. Probably the sound of feet made Mr. Booth look up from his tea in the dining-room; and if so, he would have seen the three girls as they tore past the side window, hatless and excited, with their hair streaming behind them.

They actually stayed, not only out of the house, but out of the garden, till Susan appeared, walking slowly under the weight of her baskets, or perhaps in the enjoyment of the beautiful evening. She received a tumultuous greeting from the children; and heard the account of Mr. Booth's arrival, along with a most unflattering description of his personal appearance, and many complaints about his ringing and *not* ringing of bells, before she reached the kitchen door. When it was discovered, by cautious reconnoitring, that he had found his way to the study, the children resumed possession of the dining room, and the tea things were removed. Whether Mr. Booth had finished his meal contentedly without the aid of butter, or whether he had attempted to obtain some by ringing, was never known.

But Isabel and Loulou had no more time for giggling and chattering that evening. Saturday night brought other duties than those of entertaining stranger ministers when mamma and Maggie were away, and real, hard work was awaiting the girls in the house. The little ones must have their warm bath; clean clothes had to be laid out, ready for the morrow; and fresh tuckers and missing buttons had to be sewed on little garments. In all this, no help was to be expected from Susan, who had Sunday's

dinner to prepare; and to-night the girls found their business unusually difficult, owing to the state of excitement the children were in. It was well that Isabel and Loulou were inclined to work in unison, for their task would otherwise have been impossible. As it was, they did capitally. They got one child after another safely washed and put to bed, without losing their own temper over the pranks of the young monkeys; they laid every thing neat and ready by the bedsides, so that there need be no hindrance in dressing Dolly, and no excuse for the boys coming down without collars or ties in the morning; and finally, with brave hearts though tired hands, they sat down to the necessary mending.

It would, perhaps, have been well for Elly, had she been provided with some such occupation as those which had so effectually sobered her sisters. But Elly was no needlewoman, and could give little assistance to the others, except in the matter of fetching and carrying, at which, to do her justice, she was willing enough to work. But her spirits rose higher and higher as the evening went on; she jumped about, and ran from room to room, poking fun at the children, laughing at her sisters, and shouting miscellaneous quotations from different authors, with or without connection to the matter in hand. In vain did Isabel advise her to go and read or write quietly; in vain did Loulou grimly prophesy that, if she did not calm herself betimes, she would be in tears before the evening was out. Elly was uncontrollable.

"Isabel," said Loulou, as the mending drew to a close, "do you think there's any need of having worship to-night? I mean, don't you think we may as well read to ourselves as we generally do, and not have Susan in, or Mr. Booth?"

"It would be very nice," said Isabel longingly; "and then we could slip off to bed without seeing him again! But I'm afraid it wouldn't do. I don't think papa and mamma would approve."

"Very well," said Loulou; "I suppose you're right. Only, I think it would be quite as profitable to read to ourselves."

"Still," said Isabel, doubtfully. And at that moment Elly entered, and seeing what her sisters were about, stood still at the door, and broke into Hood's "Song of the Shirt:"—

> "Seam, and gusset, and band,
> Band, and gusset, and seam,
> Till over the buttons *you* fall asleep,
> And sew them on in a dream."

"Hold your foolish tongue, Elly," said Loulou, laughing.

"What, you egg!" retorted the youngest sister, assuming a threatening attitude.

"Do stop your nonsense now," pleaded Isabel, "and let me get my last button sewn on in peace!"

"Hear her, all ye powers at Miss Martyn's!" cried Elly; "Miss Maria, Mr. Sherwood, hear your pupil! She calls the words of the immortal Shakespeare *nonsense!*"

"Elly," said Loulou impressively, "you had better be quiet; we are going to have worship immediately. I'm just going to carry these clothes upstairs, and then tell Susan to ring the lobby bell and ask Mr. Booth to come in and have prayers. And if you don't stop raving and giggling now, you'll be sure to misbehave."

The warning was well meant, but ill judged. It is true that Elly did her best to comply with Loulou's advice, by sitting down on the sofa and ceasing to declaim. But her

countenance suddenly changed into an expression of fear and helplessness, and her sister's words took in her mind the form of a prophecy, the fulfilment of which was inevitable.

"Oh me!" she whispered to Isabel, as the bell rang for prayers; "I'll be sure to do it!"

"No, no, don't," was the hasty entreaty.

"But I can't help it. I've got a-going, and I can't stop."

Mr. Booth, summoned by Susan, strode quickly across the narrow lobby, and took his seat at the dining-room table, where the big Bible was laid ready for him beside the lamp. As he entered without looking at his audience, Loulou, sitting prim in an arm-chair, darted a rapid glance of intelligence towards the sofa where Isabel and Elly were together in the shadow. The furtive smile brought back the remembrance of Mr. Booth's first appearance, and Isabel's gravity was nearly upset by it; though every trace of amusement had vanished in an instant from Loulou's face, and she was gazing at her visitor with an appearance of polite attention. As for Elly, it was doubtful whether she had caught sight of the twinkle in Loulou's eyes; but nothing mattered very much to her then. She felt that her fate was sealed. She knew she would laugh. What was to cause the final explosion seemed uncertain, but she felt that the mere wagging of Dandy's tail would be enough.

Before Mr. Booth began to read, Elly shook and spluttered in her corner; and he gave an angry look in the direction from which the disturbance came. Loulou frowned at her little sister; Isabel twitched her dress. Elly struggled to be quiet, and succeeded for some moments in stifling all sounds, though she writhed convulsively with

the efforts she was making; but her laughter broke out all the more violently at last, and there was nothing for it but to make a rush from the room. Mr. Booth remained silent until the door slammed behind her, and then began to read in a rapid, irritated tone, while his listeners all held down their heads in shame.

The instant the girls rose from their knees, they made haste to follow Elly's example—feeling too angry with their little sister, and with Mr. Booth for being angry with her, to wait to make hospitable offers of supper, or even to exchange good-night wishes. They flew up to their room as if they feared pursuit, and did not wait to take breath until they had got the door locked behind them. Then they turned round upon Elly, who was crouching on her bed in so dejected an attitude that Loulou had not at first the heart to fling back the reproof that had been launched at her in the morning. But when Elly, at sight of her sisters, unclasped her hands, and fell back flat in another fit of laughter, down it came upon her unmercifully.

"What would papa say if he had heard *you?*"

Elly lay prostrate on the bed and groaned.

"What *made* you do it?" asked Loulou, in impatience.

"I knew I would," she answered helplessly. "I couldn't help it. I knew I would."

"Well, if you determined beforehand to do it—"

"I hadn't determined. I had a presentiment."

"You had a fiddlestick," said Loulou crossly.

"Oh no, I hadn't. That's quite a mistake," said Elly, her sense of humour rising uppermost even in her grief, and requiring this protest against the impotence of Loulou's expression of indignation.

"What was it that made you laugh?" asked Isabel.

Then Elly fell a-laughing again, though her laughter sounded very much like crying. "I can scarcely tell you, it was so silly. I knew I was going to do it, and I was just waiting for something to make me; and I saw the book-mark in the Bible, and I thought of the one Jim made for granny, and bungled so. I mean the one with 'Hop on, hop ever,' on it."

"You must have been badly off for something to laugh at, when you had to rake up *that* old joke," said Loulou scornfully. "If *I* had been wanting to laugh, I would have found something better."

"But I *didn't* want," said Elly: and she turned round on her face and sobbed.

"There now! didn't I tell you you would be crying before night!" said Loulou, not without some satisfaction at the fulfilment of her own evil prognostications. "I'm disgusted with you, Elly; you've put us all to shame. A pretty set of giggling, romping babies this man must think us!" The last words were spoken in regret that was real enough.

Loulou was unmerciful, because she had no sympathy with Elly's weaknesses—being, indeed, gifted with a power of self-control quite remarkable in one of her years. But her anger and disappointment went further back than Elly's fault. She had meant that the entertainment of this probationer should be exceptionally good—something to be boasted of in future times as an example of what Isabel and Loulou could do unaided. For she had not wanted to keep Isabel in the background; she would fain have shown that she could work with her, and for her. She had meant this night's success to be won by sisterly love. Her motives had been good, as far as she could see, looking back honestly; and her work had been good too. But

the fates had been against her. Mr. Booth had come at a wrong time; the butter had fallen short most inopportunely; and when matters were at last getting into order, Elly's folly had put everything wrong again. It was very hard to look back upon the misfortunes of the evening, and, feeling they were not her own fault, still keep her temper. Why is it that these unlucky times come sometimes, do what we will to prevent them? Perhaps, for one thing, to teach the Loulous of the world, the managing, self-reliant people, that the administration of things terrestrial is not altogether in their hands. This little thirteen-year-old girl, with the bright eyes and clever fingers, was actually beginning to think that she could put right, and keep right, all household matters, whatever they were, if only she chose to do it.

While Loulou gave herself up to gloomy thoughts and unplaited her hair, Elly sat on the bed in her misery, but made no more attempts to excuse herself. At last, Isabel, as she passed the bed, held out her hand to pat her; and the pitying fingers were seized and held fast, while Elly asked, "Do you think I'm very wicked, very profane?"

"No," Isabel answered; "you were only stupid and nervous."

"I was worse than that," said Elly dolefully.

"I don't think it. You didn't mean any irreverence, and there is no use in struggling against laughter when it becomes a nervous affection." Isabel had prepared this little speech in the silence which had preceded Elly's appeal to her, and now she was quite pleased to hear how well it sounded. Loulou, also, seemed impressed, and began to use the hair-brush more slowly, as if waiting to hear further. But, to Elly, her sister's neatly-turned sentence brought no comfort whatever.

"There is no good in quibbling, or shutting one's eyes to one's sins," said she, with a touch of impatience. "If one were in a right frame of mind, and remembered what having worship really means, would one laugh? But when one thinks of their own feelings, instead of praying, as I did —as I often do—" Here her sentence broke down, and ended in a wail: "Oh, will I ever be better?"

"If you put it that way," said Isabel, much moved—"if you put it that way, I have nothing to say, except that I am as bad as you. I sat still, and did not laugh; but I wasn't attending a bit. Now I think of it, I don't even know what chapter it was that Mr. Booth was reading!"

But the assurance that another had sinned as deeply as she, was not enough to console Elly; and Isabel, fain as she was to say more, felt her lips sealed by Loulou's presence. Had Loulou added her confession of inattention at prayers—as she could very truthfully have done—to those of her sisters, the spell might have been broken, and Isabel could have said her say openly and naturally enough. But Loulou veiled herself in her hair, and kept silence; and what she was thinking of, Isabel wondered wistfully but could not guess at all. For between these two, so near in age, there had reigned, almost ever since they could remember, a complete silence about sacred subjects. Isabel had spoken to her cousin Agnes, and she had spoken to some of her companions at school, about what she would have called "good things;" but with her own family she felt a strange reserve, which had been broken through only in the case of Elly, when the little girl's troubles seemed too great to be met in any other way.

Now, as Elly sat and sobbed, words of sympathy and

hope rose up in Isabel's heart, which she felt it would not be unfitting for her to say, because they involved self-condemnation as well as told of mercy. God had given her a message to her little sister which even an unfaithful servant might deliver. She longed to speak; but dared not let any hear, but the one sorrowful little soul her words were specially meant for.

So Isabel turned her back upon the others when she sat down to read her Bible, and bringing a pencil and scrap of paper from her pocket, scribbled a few hasty words before she closed the book. "Read now, and go to bed," she said, laying Bible and note in Elly's lap. Then a sudden panic seized her. She dared not watch what Elly did, or whether Loulou was observant, but hastened to the other end of the room and undressed quickly, with averted eyes.

As might have been expected, Elly opened and read what Isabel had written, full under the watchful gaze of Loulou, whose attention had been attracted by her elder sister's mysterious movements. Loulou was extremely curious to know what the little missive brought; but partly pride, and partly some better motive, made her keep silence. Nevertheless, she found herself debating hard whether, if by any chance she got possession of the crumpled morsel of paper, it would be dishonourable of her to read its contents.

There was, however, no need of settling this puzzling question, for Elly, who was usually so careless, kept her note as if it were something very precious; and no eyes but her own caught sight of what was written there. But even if Loulou had got her wish, she would have found nothing particularly striking or original in the blurred and hasty scrawl, where Isabel had conveyed her help and consolation

by a historical reference. She had written, "Remember what the good old monk said to Luther in the monastery, and comforted him so. *We* 'believe in the forgiveness of sins too,' don't we?"

CHAPTER XII.

ARCHY'S ILLNESS.

"But of *thee* it shall be said,
This dog watched beside a bed
Day and night unweary;
Watched within a curtained room
Where no sunlight brake the gloom
Round the sick and dreary."

E. B. Browning.

TOULOU had just finished plaiting Isabel's hair next morning when Jim came to the door, and on being admitted, requested that his collar might be fastened, and informed his sisters that Archy was ill. This intelligence naturally caused some dismay, and Isabel, with uneasy thoughts of a case of scarlet fever in the neighbourhood which she had heard of the day before, hastened to see the patient. She found Archy still in bed, covered up to his eyes with the clothes, and blinking at the blaze of sunlight pouring through the window, with a look of thoughtful content.

"Archy, what's the matter with you? Are you ill?"

"Yes," he answered gently.

"What's the matter?" Isabel asked again, anxiously. "Have you a sore throat?"

After some reflection, Archy replied, "No; I'm yeak."

"Weak, are you?" said Isabel, somewhat relieved. "I don't believe you know what that means. Let me see

you;" and she pulled the blankets down from the rosy, chubby face. "You look very well."

"But I'm *not* yell," persisted Archy.

"Have you a headache?"

"No"—again, rather reluctantly—"but I'm yeak, very yeak, and" (as a happy thought seemed to strike him) "I'm hyot, very hyot."

"You are hot," said Isabel, feeling his hands; "but I think that's only because you've rolled yourself up so tight, and this is a warm morning. Come now, jump up, quick; we're all nearly dressed. You'll know better how you feel when you are downstairs."

"Not yable to get yup—not yable to come downstairs," said Archy, plaintively but firmly; and to all further attempts at persuasion he gave the same reply. Isabel therefore returned to her room to ask counsel of Loulou, who was rapidly finishing her own dressing, which had been previously retarded by her operations for her sister's benefit. Loulou proved very sceptical about Archy's illness, suggesting his well-known dislike to saying his catechism as the probable cause of his weakness and fever, and urging strongly that if he refused to rise, he should be compelled to do so by main force.

"I don't like to haul him out of bed," said Isabel, reluctantly.

"Wait till I've fastened my pig-tails then, and I'll do it," said Loulou, looking as if she rather enjoyed the prospect.

"But he persists so hard that he's ill."

"Little scamp!"

"Then we don't know how he feels, Loulou. He was out pretty late last night; he may be taking a cold. I hope it may be nothing worse! If the child turned out to be

really ill, and we had been unkind and bullied him—." The idea was too awful, and Isabel could not finish her sentence. When she spoke again, it was to take up a new line of argument. "Besides, you know, papa would never allow his word to be doubted."

That was true. The children of the manse had found from their earliest youth that their parents reposed perfect trust in their honour; and the effect of this system had been to develop the natural candour of Isabel and Elly into a scrupulous regard for truth, while it seemed to correct any tendencies to deceit or evasion which Loulou's sharper and more reserved nature might have been tempted to yield to. Isabel's last argument was therefore accepted as conclusive. Loulou even felt it a reproof, and flushed as pink as the ribbon with which she was tying her hair; for she was well aware what her father's judgment about this case would be, and feared that he might consider her own ready suspicions of Archy as anything but a proof of nobility of character. Perhaps Isabel and Elly were slow to believe their little brother was deceiving, not because they were stupid, but because they were incapable of such conduct themselves. Still, I rather think that, deep down in her own heart, Loulou kept her opinion. She did not urge it any longer, however, and it was agreed that Archy should be allowed to remain in bed.

Isabel therefore returned to the boys' room, and smoothed the blankets for her little brother, and drew down the blind to keep the light from his eyes. He lay there in cosy stillness for a time, while Isabel put the finishing touches to Jim's toilet, and almost lost patience over her own vain endeavours to make him as tidy for the Sunday breakfast as her mother or Maggie would have done.

countenance suddenly changed into an expression of fear and helplessness, and her sister's words took in her mind the form of a prophecy, the fulfilment of which was inevitable.

"Oh me!" she whispered to Isabel, as the bell rang for prayers; "I'll be sure to do it!"

"No, no, don't," was the hasty entreaty.

"But I can't help it. I've got a-going, and I can't stop."

Mr. Booth, summoned by Susan, strode quickly across the narrow lobby, and took his seat at the dining-room table, where the big Bible was laid ready for him beside the lamp. As he entered without looking at his audience, Loulou, sitting prim in an arm-chair, darted a rapid glance of intelligence towards the sofa where Isabel and Elly were together in the shadow. The furtive smile brought back the remembrance of Mr. Booth's first appearance, and Isabel's gravity was nearly upset by it; though every trace of amusement had vanished in an instant from Loulou's face, and she was gazing at her visitor with an appearance of polite attention. As for Elly, it was doubtful whether she had caught sight of the twinkle in Loulou's eyes; but nothing mattered very much to her then. She felt that her fate was sealed. She knew she would laugh. What was to cause the final explosion seemed uncertain, but she felt that the mere wagging of Dandy's tail would be enough.

Before Mr. Booth began to read, Elly shook and spluttered in her corner; and he gave an angry look in the direction from which the disturbance came. Loulou frowned at her little sister; Isabel twitched her dress. Elly struggled to be quiet, and succeeded for some moments in stifling all sounds, though she writhed convulsively with

the efforts she was making; but her laughter broke out all the more violently at last, and there was nothing for it but to make a rush from the room. Mr. Booth remained silent until the door slammed behind her, and then began to read in a rapid, irritated tone, while his listeners all held down their heads in shame.

The instant the girls rose from their knees, they made haste to follow Elly's example—feeling too angry with their little sister, and with Mr. Booth for being angry with her, to wait to make hospitable offers of supper, or even to exchange good-night wishes. They flew up to their room as if they feared pursuit, and did not wait to take breath until they had got the door locked behind them. Then they turned round upon Elly, who was crouching on her bed in so dejected an attitude that Loulou had not at first the heart to fling back the reproof that had been launched at her in the morning. But when Elly, at sight of her sisters, unclasped her hands, and fell back flat in another fit of laughter, down it came upon her unmercifully.

"What would papa say if he had heard *you?*"

Elly lay prostrate on the bed and groaned.

"What *made* you do it?" asked Loulou, in impatience.

"I knew I would," she answered helplessly. "I couldn't help it. I knew I would."

"Well, if you determined beforehand to do it—"

"I hadn't determined. I had a presentiment."

"You had a fiddlestick," said Loulou crossly.

"Oh no, I hadn't. That's quite a mistake," said Elly, her sense of humour rising uppermost even in her grief, and requiring this protest against the impotence of Loulou's expression of indignation.

"What was it that made you laugh?" asked Isabel.

any means appeased, when the would-be patient assured her so sweetly of his tranquillity of mind. Yet Loulou was too severe in her judgment. Archy's ailments certainly existed nowhere except in his own imagination, but there they were very real indeed. He had begun by wishing to be ill, that he might enjoy the petting and indulgences generally given to sufferers; and after that it had not taken very long to work himself up into the belief that the longed-for malady had come.

When his sisters left him, Archy did not change his position or relax his efforts to look gentle and resigned, but lay peacefully back on his pillows, and tried to think such thoughts as he considered proper for one who was weak but happy. That this occupation should content him for long was impossible, but for a time he found it quite amusing enough; and, before he was tired, Jim came back to him, sympathizing and serviceable, and quite inclined to provide new diversions for his afflicted brother.

It had been considered best that Dolly should breakfast in the kitchen that morning, and Elly, as well as Jim, had elected to do the same; so that, when Mr. Booth came down to the dining-room, he found no one there but the older girls, both on their very best behaviour. Isabel felt renewed courage and dignity in the consciousness of the length and fashionable shape of her pretty brown dress, and the tidy firmness of her plaited hair; while Loulou, the picture of cleanness and freshness, in her white muslin and knots of pink ribbon, was anxious, by great staidness and gravity of demeanour, to do away with the effect her present childish costume, and the still more objectionable attire of last night, might have produced on the mind of her visitor.

But if the Maitlands had ever any chance of gaining

that gentleman's favourable opinion, it was now entirely over. Mr. Booth looked with the utmost disapproval on the place he had come to, and the people who inhabited it. He was not fond of country life, and he fancied he was having a very rough experience of it at Abbotsmuir. He had no natural love for children, and he considered that he had been very rudely treated by those of the Maitland family.

He came down to breakfast, therefore, in a very ill humour, and responded most ungraciously to the timid, or prim remarks with which Isabel and Loulou attempted to make polite conversation. They talked of the walk from the station, and he complained bitterly of its length; they talked of the country as beautiful, and he called it dreary and barren. Even the castle, their grandest subject of all, failed in exciting any agreeable interest; Mr. Booth only wondered why, if the Abbotsmuir property were really a valuable one, the owners had never built a convenient modern house upon it.

To fail in admiration of their home was an unpardonable sin in the girls' eyes; and when their audacious visitor even went so far as to express pity for their father because he was spending his life at Abbotsmuir, and avow his own intention of never accepting a country charge, Isabel actually turned pale with wrath. How dared he—young, self-conceited, and ignorant as he was—speak slightingly of the loveliest county in all Scotland, and pretend to be sorry for one so infinitely above him, socially, morally, and intellectually, as the minister of Abbotsmuir? Loulou's indignation was as hot as her sister's, but it was mingled rather with contempt than horror; and she longed to suggest to this self-confident young gentleman that it was unlikely he would have his pick and choice among town

"There is no good in quibbling, or shutting one's eyes to one's sins," said she, with a touch of impatience. "If one were in a right frame of mind, and remembered what having worship really means, would one laugh? But when one thinks of their own feelings, instead of praying, as I did —as I often do—" Here her sentence broke down, and ended in a wail: "Oh, will I ever be better?"

"If you put it that way," said Isabel, much moved—"if you put it that way, I have nothing to say, except that I am as bad as you. I sat still, and did not laugh; but I wasn't attending a bit. Now I think of it, I don't even know what chapter it was that Mr. Booth was reading!"

But the assurance that another had sinned as deeply as she, was not enough to console Elly; and Isabel, fain as she was to say more, felt her lips sealed by Loulou's presence. Had Loulou added her confession of inattention at prayers—as she could very truthfully have done—to those of her sisters, the spell might have been broken, and Isabel could have said her say openly and naturally enough. But Loulou veiled herself in her hair, and kept silence; and what she was thinking of, Isabel wondered wistfully but could not guess at all. For between these two, so near in age, there had reigned, almost ever since they could remember, a complete silence about sacred subjects. Isabel had spoken to her cousin Agnes, and she had spoken to some of her companions at school, about what she would have called "good things;" but with her own family she felt a strange reserve, which had been broken through only in the case of Elly, when the little girl's troubles seemed too great to be met in any other way.

Now, as Elly sat and sobbed, words of sympathy and

hope rose up in Isabel's heart, which she felt it would not be unfitting for her to say, because they involved self-condemnation as well as told of mercy. God had given her a message to her little sister which even an unfaithful servant might deliver. She longed to speak; but dared not let any hear, but the one sorrowful little soul her words were specially meant for.

So Isabel turned her back upon the others when she sat down to read her Bible, and bringing a pencil and scrap of paper from her pocket, scribbled a few hasty words before she closed the book. "Read now, and go to bed," she said, laying Bible and note in Elly's lap. Then a sudden panic seized her. She dared not watch what Elly did, or whether Loulou was observant, but hastened to the other end of the room and undressed quickly, with averted eyes.

As might have been expected, Elly opened and read what Isabel had written, full under the watchful gaze of Loulou, whose attention had been attracted by her elder sister's mysterious movements. Loulou was extremely curious to know what the little missive brought; but partly pride, and partly some better motive, made her keep silence. Nevertheless, she found herself debating hard whether, if by any chance she got possession of the crumpled morsel of paper, it would be dishonourable of her to read its contents.

There was, however, no need of settling this puzzling question, for Elly, who was usually so careless, kept her note as if it were something very precious; and no eyes but her own caught sight of what was written there. But even if Loulou had got her wish, she would have found nothing particularly striking or original in the blurred and hasty scrawl, where Isabel had conveyed her help and consolation

by a historical reference. She had written, "Remember what the good old monk said to Luther in the monastery, and comforted him so. *We* 'believe in the forgiveness of sins too,' don't we?"

CHAPTER XII.

ARCHY'S ILLNESS.

"But of *thee* it shall be said,
This dog watched beside a bed
Day and night unweary;
Watched within a curtained room
Where no sunlight brake the gloom
Round the sick and dreary."

E. B. BROWNING.

OULOU had just finished plaiting Isabel's hair next morning when Jim came to the door, and on being admitted, requested that his collar might be fastened, and informed his sisters that Archy was ill. This intelligence naturally caused some dismay, and Isabel, with uneasy thoughts of a case of scarlet fever in the neighbourhood which she had heard of the day before, hastened to see the patient. She found Archy still in bed, covered up to his eyes with the clothes, and blinking at the blaze of sunlight pouring through the window, with a look of thoughtful content.

"Archy, what's the matter with you? Are you ill?"

"Yes," he answered gently.

"What's the matter?" Isabel asked again, anxiously. "Have you a sore throat?"

After some reflection, Archy replied, "No; I'm yeak."

"Weak, are you?" said Isabel, somewhat relieved. "I don't believe you know what that means. Let me see

you;" and she pulled the blankets down from the rosy, chubby face. "You look very well."

"But I'm *not* yell," persisted Archy.

"Have you a headache?"

"No"—again, rather reluctantly—"but I'm yeak, very yeak, and" (as a happy thought seemed to strike him) "I'm hyot, very hyot."

"You are hot," said Isabel, feeling his hands; "but I think that's only because you've rolled yourself up so tight, and this is a warm morning. Come now, jump up, quick; we're all nearly dressed. You'll know better how you feel when you are downstairs."

"Not yable to get yup—not yable to come downstairs," said Archy, plaintively but firmly; and to all further attempts at persuasion he gave the same reply. Isabel therefore returned to her room to ask counsel of Loulou, who was rapidly finishing her own dressing, which had been previously retarded by her operations for her sister's benefit. Loulou proved very sceptical about Archy's illness, suggesting his well-known dislike to saying his catechism as the probable cause of his weakness and fever, and urging strongly that if he refused to rise, he should be compelled to do so by main force.

"I don't like to haul him out of bed," said Isabel, reluctantly.

"Wait till I've fastened my pig-tails then, and I'll do it," said Loulou, looking as if she rather enjoyed the prospect.

"But he persists so hard that he's ill."

"Little scamp!"

"Then we don't know how he feels, Loulou. He was out pretty late last night; he may be taking a cold. I hope it may be nothing worse! If the child turned out to be

really ill, and we had been unkind and bullied him—." The idea was too awful, and Isabel could not finish her sentence. When she spoke again, it was to take up a new line of argument. "Besides, you know, papa would never allow his word to be doubted."

That was true. The children of the manse had found from their earliest youth that their parents reposed perfect trust in their honour; and the effect of this system had been to develop the natural candour of Isabel and Elly into a scrupulous regard for truth, while it seemed to correct any tendencies to deceit or evasion which Loulou's sharper and more reserved nature might have been tempted to yield to. Isabel's last argument was therefore accepted as conclusive. Loulou even felt it a reproof, and flushed as pink as the ribbon with which she was tying her hair; for she was well aware what her father's judgment about this case would be, and feared that he might consider her own ready suspicions of Archy as anything but a proof of nobility of character. Perhaps Isabel and Elly were slow to believe their little brother was deceiving, not because they were stupid, but because they were incapable of such conduct themselves. Still, I rather think that, deep down in her own heart, Loulou kept her opinion. She did not urge it any longer, however, and it was agreed that Archy should be allowed to remain in bed.

Isabel therefore returned to the boys' room, and smoothed the blankets for her little brother, and drew down the blind to keep the light from his eyes. He lay there in cosy stillness for a time, while Isabel put the finishing touches to Jim's toilet, and almost lost patience over her own vain endeavours to make him as tidy for the Sunday breakfast as her mother or Maggie would have done.

"You're dreadful stupid," said Jim at last.

He had a great deal of endurance in his composition, but Isabel had unfastened his necktie for the sixth time, and he was beginning to find it wearisome.

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again," said Isabel, (checking her first impulse, which was to retort angrily, "Do you think it's any pleasure to me to tie your bows?") "Do wait a little, dear. We'll manage the seventh time, surely; the spider did, you know."

After the first, it was easy enough to speak kindly; and the allusion to the persevering insect which encouraged the Bruce, or else something in the tone of his sister's voice, made Jim's rather sulky countenance relax into a smile, and he stood with exemplary stillness till Isabel pronounced that he would "do now."

Archy meanwhile had been thinking over his illness, and had got a new idea on the subject, which he was desirous of imparting to his relatives with all possible solemnity. He was exceedingly sorry for himself, and much enjoyed the unusual feeling, but he wished that other people should be sorry for him too.

"Isa," said he, "I think there's something yong with my heart."

"My dear little boy—why?" cried Isabel, with renewed alarm.

There was a pause; and then Archy said, "It's beating!"

Isabel struggled with her laughter for some moments before she could answer—"You would be badly off if it weren't."

"But dyeadful youd, Isabel!" urged Archy.

"I think that's just because you're listening to it," said Isabel. "Archy, are you sure you're ill at all?"

"Yes, yes; I'm yill, yill!" he answered; and Isabel was once more silenced.

Presently Loulou and Elly, all ready for breakfast, appeared at the door to ask for the invalid. "How are you now, Archy?"

He beamed on them seraphically from his pillow. "I'm yeak; but I'm kyite happy!"

All three girls made a precipitate retreat from the room.

"If he *could* read," said Loulou, as they stood once more in their own chamber, and laughed below their breath—"if he *could* read, I would think he had been busy with some of your old pet memoirs, Isabel."

"Ah, well, we may laugh now," said Isabel; "but I wish I could be sure there wasn't much the matter with him. Feeling ill, and not being able to tell what is the matter with you, is the way serious illnesses come on. And mamma so far away! I wish I could make my mind easy about him."

Loulou stared at her sister for a moment with a curious mixture of amusement and admiration in her face. Then she stamped her foot slightly, as she had a way of doing when she took a resolution.

"I'll undertake to find out whether he's ill or not," said she.

"Oh, Louly, you mustn't be hard on him!"

"Not I; I give you my word. I'll treat him in a way which will be very good for him if he *is* ill;"—Loulou was out of the room before she added, "and will serve him very right if he's *not*."

In truth, her idea that Archy was trying to cheat them all had been strengthened by the sight of the blooming contented face nestling so snugly in the pillows; and her indignation had been only forgotten for a moment, not by

any means appeased, when the would-be patient assured her so sweetly of his tranquillity of mind. Yet Loulou was too severe in her judgment. Archy's ailments certainly existed nowhere except in his own imagination, but there they were very real indeed. He had begun by wishing to be ill, that he might enjoy the petting and indulgences generally given to sufferers; and after that it had not taken very long to work himself up into the belief that the longed-for malady had come.

When his sisters left him, Archy did not change his position or relax his efforts to look gentle and resigned, but lay peacefully back on his pillows, and tried to think such thoughts as he considered proper for one who was weak but happy. That this occupation should content him for long was impossible, but for a time he found it quite amusing enough; and, before he was tired, Jim came back to him, sympathizing and serviceable, and quite inclined to provide new diversions for his afflicted brother.

It had been considered best that Dolly should breakfast in the kitchen that morning, and Elly, as well as Jim, had elected to do the same; so that, when Mr. Booth came down to the dining-room, he found no one there but the older girls, both on their very best behaviour. Isabel felt renewed courage and dignity in the consciousness of the length and fashionable shape of her pretty brown dress, and the tidy firmness of her plaited hair; while Loulou, the picture of cleanness and freshness, in her white muslin and knots of pink ribbon, was anxious, by great staidness and gravity of demeanour, to do away with the effect her present childish costume, and the still more objectionable attire of last night, might have produced on the mind of her visitor.

But if the Maitlands had ever any chance of gaining

that gentleman's favourable opinion, it was now entirely over. Mr. Booth looked with the utmost disapproval on the place he had come to, and the people who inhabited it. He was not fond of country life, and he fancied he was having a very rough experience of it at Abbotsmuir. He had no natural love for children, and he considered that he had been very rudely treated by those of the Maitland family.

He came down to breakfast, therefore, in a very ill humour, and responded most ungraciously to the timid, or prim remarks with which Isabel and Loulou attempted to make polite conversation. They talked of the walk from the station, and he complained bitterly of its length; they talked of the country as beautiful, and he called it dreary and barren. Even the castle, their grandest subject of all, failed in exciting any agreeable interest; Mr. Booth only wondered why, if the Abbotsmuir property were really a valuable one, the owners had never built a convenient modern house upon it.

To fail in admiration of their home was an unpardonable sin in the girls' eyes; and when their audacious visitor even went so far as to express pity for their father because he was spending his life at Abbotsmuir, and avow his own intention of never accepting a country charge, Isabel actually turned pale with wrath. How dared he—young, self-conceited, and ignorant as he was—speak slightingly of the loveliest county in all Scotland, and pretend to be sorry for one so infinitely above him, socially, morally, and intellectually, as the minister of Abbotsmuir? Loulou's indignation was as hot as her sister's, but it was mingled rather with contempt than horror; and she longed to suggest to this self-confident young gentleman that it was unlikely he would have his pick and choice among town

and country churches, while she derived great satisfaction in mentally predicting a long period of probation for him. But the girls only expressed their anger by exchanging meaning glances when Mr. Booth was not observing them, and opposing to the disagreeable remarks of their visitor a silence which he quite misunderstood. For Isabel's shyness prevented her even wishing to maintain her dearest opinions openly before a stranger; and Loulou was at present determined to be modest and well behaved—which meant, according to Mr. Maitland's interpretation of the terms, being very quiet in the presence of grown-up visitors.

So Mr. Booth got what satisfaction he could in letting out his ill-humour, without any one contradicting his remarks; and probably, if he considered the subject at all he came to the conclusion that the girls who listened to him were rather more silly than most of a class of beings always remarkable for having very few ideas in their heads. Little did he guess how Isabel and Loulou were criticising him—noticing his manners, making bitter mental comments on his views, and busily preparing for an outburst of ridicule and denunciation whenever he had left the room. Little did he guess how graphically and fully they would describe him and his ways in writing to their parents; and how he would figure in the traditions and chronicles of the manse, and be brought up again and again for consideration and derision in after-days. Young men are not generally very careful about the good opinion of what are vulgarly styled "bread-and-butter misses;" and yet, if Mr. Booth had only known how the daughters of the Abbotsmuir Manse were sitting in judgment on him, I think that dismay would have mingled with his astonishment at the discovery.

But Mr. Booth, all unknowing, went on with his breakfast; and the only startling thing that occurred was calculated rather to strengthen his idea that the place where it was his misfortune to tarry for a while was in a lamentable state of barbarism.

Loulou had undertaken to carry up Archy's breakfast; but whether from forgetfulness or other reasons, she made no preparations for doing so until the meal in the dining-room was nearly over. Then—perhaps glad enough of an excuse to get out of Mr. Booth's company for a while—she rose and made ready a tray for her little brother; putting on it one little piece of dry toast and a cup of milk and water.

"Is that all you're going to take up?" asked Isabel.

"When people are ill," Loulou made answer demurely, "they haven't any appetite, and they are better not to force themselves to eat."

"But he'll want some butter."

"People can't always get butter when they want it; it's well to learn to be independent of such things." And leaving Isabel to struggle with the laughter which the allusion to last night's experience provoked, Loulou walked off with the tray.

But, as she opened the door, the sound of a wild, piercing shriek rang through the house. It seemed to come from Archy's room; but Isabel's terror was speedily changed to mingled relief and bewilderment, for the voice was the voice of a hen.

After the first surprise was over, Mr. Booth inquired, with a sardonic grin, whether it was the custom in these parts to keep fowls in the dwelling-houses, as it was in Ireland. Isabel, flustered and stammering, made answer

rather lamely that she didn't think so; she supposed one had got upstairs by mistake.

"Most extraordinary!" said Mr. Booth, rather to himself than his hostess, who felt she could have sunk beneath the floor with shame.

And then the noise upstairs began again; sounding nearer and more broken this time, and accompanied by fluttering and flapping, and the sound of human feet and voices. For Loulou had not been hindered on her path by the strange outcry which greeted her ears. Indeed, so fast did she rush upstairs that she had no time to consider what the reason of it might be; and was therefore considerably taken aback when, on opening the door of the boys' room, she was met face to face by a hen, as eager to hurry out as she was to come in. With another horrible screech it flew at her, alighted for an instant on the top of Archy's toast, and then went right over her head, and ran cackling along the passage in the direction of Mr. Booth's chamber. After it went Loulou, hastily laying down her tray; and after it went Jim, who came out of his brother's room with a flushed, excited face. Jim it was who brought the alarmed fowl to bay at last, and, clasping it tight in his arms, carried it, in spite of the most violent struggling and cackling, safely out of the house.

Loulou went back to Archy, and gazed at him sternly. Archy meanwhile was gazing at the tray.

"Now, aren't you and Jim two wicked boys?" said she.

"No," said he; "hens is kyite for Sabbath."

"Hens in their proper place, perhaps; but certainly not hens in your bed room. What would mamma say? What did you mean by it?"

"It was only Fine Old Fyowl," said Archy.

This was a hen which had been long in the family, and

was a special favourite with the boys—who, indeed, loved all the hens, and would rather have gone dinnerless any day than eat a morsel of their flesh.

"And what were you doing to Fine Old Fowl to make her skraigh so?"

"We did nuzzing to her," said Archy. "She jumped on ye table, and saw herself in ye gyass, and she was fyightened."

Loulou felt the corners of her mouth twitching inconveniently, and Archy's next remark fairly upset her gravity: "I was so yeak, You-you, and so yill, I thought I would yike to see my Fine Old Fyowl again."

Loulou laughed; but Archy was solemn enough, for he had not only his ailments to consider, but the exceeding smallness of his breakfast. It did not look very savoury either, but he was hungry enough to be more concerned about quantity than quality. He made an end of the toast in a couple of mouthfuls, and then turning to Loulou, who stood looking on, he said, quite politely, though with some querulousness in his voice, "Some more to yeat, pyease."

"No, no. You've had quite enough."

"But I'm hyungry, You-you," said Archy, throwing a pathetic emphasis on the "y's," which he seemed to feel it necessary to introduce into every possible word.

"Then, my boy, either you're not ill at all, or it's an unhealthy hunger you've got—an unnatural craving—a very bad thing indeed. It would never do to give in to it."

"I'll styarve, yen, You-you," said Archy, almost weeping.

"Not you. You've got your breakfast, and you'll get your dinner—a nice little cup of broth. I'll bring it up to you myself after we come home from church. That won't be very long now—not quite five hours. We'll all

leave you now for a while; quietness is the best thing for sick people."

She was mocking him, and he knew it, but he was helpless in her hands. He jerked himself round in bed, and turned his back upon her, and she took up the tray and went off, laughing inwardly.

Archy felt he had not bargained for this. He had expected dainty little meals and tender words; no trouble, and a great deal of petting. If his favourite hen would not stay with him, Dandy should have been brought to lie on his bed, and the cat also might have found a place there; Elly ought to have exercised her imagination in making interesting Sunday stories for her sick little brother, while Jim and Dolly amused him with their chatter, and Isabel and Loulou vied with each other in contributing to his comfort. That was the way a person with an illness ought to be treated, as Archy very well knew. But his hard-hearted friends were starving and deserting him: Fine Old Fowl had gone away; Jim had gone away; and now Loulou, after cheating him of his breakfast, had departed like the rest. It was too bad. The feelings with which Archy turned round on his pillow, and again tried to reconcile himself to his invalid solitude, were very different from the peaceful ones of the earlier morning, when a sweet self pity, and still sweeter self-importance, had reigned undisturbed in his breast.

Downstairs, meanwhile, they had prayers, and then Mr. Booth went to the study, and the girls relieved their minds by expressing their opinions about him plainly to each other. Isabel and Elly also heard how Jim had taken Fine Old Fowl to keep his brother company, and how she had been startled by seeing herself in the glass. And Loulou, anxious to set her sister's mind at rest about

THE FINE OLD FOWL.

Archy, and prevent her paying him a visit just then, assured her, with somewhat ironical gravity, that he had taken his breakfast with apparent relish, and afterwards settled down in bed again, as if he meant to go to sleep.

Then the girls, mindful that it was Sunday morning, turned from talk to books; and Isabel searched rather despondingly in a commentary for something to say to her class, while Elly established herself on the garden-seat outside the window, and read "Peep of Day" to Jim and Dolly. Loulou was the least studious of the party, for though she sat down with a large volume of a magazine in her lap, she turned over the leaves rather than read, and seemed always on the alert, as if waiting for something. And before very long that happened which she expected. A voice was heard again from the boys' room, but a human one this time, Archy's own. "You-you! You-you!" it said distinctly. And Loulou shut her book and skipped upstairs.

She found Archy sitting up in bed, red and shame-faced. "Going to get yup," he said sulkily.

"Better not, dear," said his sister blandly; "much better lie in bed and take care of yourself, and get rid of this illness. Lie down, dear little boy, and I'll cover you up, and shut the shutters to make the room nice and dark. No one will disturb you till church-time."

"Going to get yup," repeated Archy in a still more surly tone.

"Oh, bed is much the best place for ill people!" said Loulou. "But perhaps you're not ill after all?" she added in a tone of mild interrogation.

It was rather too much to expect that he was going to yield that point, however. "I *am* yill," he said, raising his voice almost to a cry.

"Then on no account get up;" and Loulou stretched out a hand as if to take away the little blue and white sock which Archy was beginning to put on.

"Yes, yes. I'm going to get yup," said Archy, making such evident preparations for a mighty howl that Loulou thought it best to give up teasing him for the present. So she dressed him rapidly, not trying his patience, as Isabel would have done, by awkwardness about buttons or ties; and in a very short time the would-be patient was ready equipped for church. The two did not have much conversation while the business was going on, but Archy found occasion to inform his sister that he had now made up his mind to "run away" with Jim, whenever *he* went, and that was to be very soon.

"And where are you going?" Loulou inquired.

Archy was apparently desirous of rivalling his sister in sarcasm, for, after a pause, he replied with awful bitterness, that he meant to go to a place where people were made "comfie" when they were ill!

"Dear, dear!" said Loulou, greatly amused. "And where is that happy land?"

The answer was given with great energy, but involved Archy in frightful difficulties of speech at the close. "Away from you, You-you!"

"Away from me, me, me!" Loulou repeated scornfully. Then, clapping his broad brimmed straw hat on the back of his head, she pushed him out of the door, with a suggestion that he might go and see if Fine Old Fowl had recovered from her fright, and a warning that he was to take care of his clothes. And when she saw him afterwards from the window of her own room, sharing a large piece of oat-cake with his feathered friend, she was wise and merciful enough to take no notice of the fact.

But, of course, Loulou boasted to her sisters of having outwitted Archy, and Isabel listened with a good deal of uneasiness mingled with her amusement. The dread still clung to her that the child might be really ill, and she bound her sister down to an agreement that Archy was not to be twitted about his ailments, or in any way made uncomfortable during the day on account of his conduct in the morning. Loulou was not very ready to promise what would deprive her of the pleasure of following up her victory to the end, and wringing a confession from the child that he had not been ill at all; but she was very pliable in Isabel's hands just then, and yielded to her, on the condition that no favourable notice should be taken of Archy's claims to invalidism. He was to have catechism as well as pudding, and be treated in every respect just as usual, unless, Isabel always stipulated, the symptoms of illness were to show themselves after all. She watched him anxiously, and it was not till she had been obliged to chide him for going rollicking home from church, and seen him finish with intense relish an unusually hearty dinner, that her mind was set at rest about the bodily health of the rogue.

Then, however, uneasy thoughts about his mental and moral well-being arose in the mind of the elder sister, which were by no means allayed when Elly told her what she had heard from Jim,—that Archy had been praying last night for an illness to come upon him! Surely there was something perverted about the religious instincts of the child. Isabel shuddered, as Elly, with an amused and yet awe-stricken look in her eyes, whispered the tale about her little brother's petition.

Clearly it was necessary that the child should have a warning, but how it was to be given was a difficult matter

to decide. It was true that here was an excellent opportunity for exercising the tender and beneficial sisterly influence Isabel had so often dreamed of, and it seemed unlikely enough that Loulou would now grudge her taking advantage of it. But where was the enthusiasm with which she ought to have seized the chance? Where were the gentle sympathy and pleasant wit that should enliven her discourse? Alas! Isabel felt herself hopelessly destitute of all these things. Not long ago she had discovered that it is much easier to know what moral stories ought to be than to make them; she was now finding out the same truth about moral lectures.

So it was entirely from a sense of duty, and not from a feeling of pleasure, that Isabel set to work to compose an admonition for Archy. She had been shy enough when she came before her Sunday-school children with no better preparation than she could make unaided; but now she felt that she would gladly try to edify them for another half-hour, rather than spend a couple of minutes in similar work upon her own little brother. Nevertheless, in obedience to the severe dictates of conscience, Isabel made ready for her task; and, acting thus, was really—though she did not know it—braver and more praiseworthy than if inclination had joined its pleasant persuasions to the voice of duty, as she so fain would have had it do.

At last she thought of something that might have a good effect upon Archy; and the next thing to be considered was, when it was to be said. The afternoon was the natural time—after the children had been sobered by their Bible-reading, and before their minds could be tired of serious impressions. They were all in the garden then, for mamma's room without mamma was altogether too dreary, and it was against rules to go to the burn-side on

Sundays. So the children congregated on the iron seat at the dining-room window, which, standing as it did on a grassy bank, commanded the best view of the hills which the garden could afford.

It was breezy and decidedly cool, and the girls wrapped themselves up in shawls when they came out with their books; the boys and Dolly were active and restless enough to be almost always warm. Archy went through his verses and his juvenile catechism much as usual, and listened afterwards with great attention to the story of Gideon. He seemed quite to have forgotten his illness of the morning, as far as Isabel watching him wistfully, and Loulou watching him sarcastically, could see.

After the reading there came a pause, and Isabel showed no desire to begin the "Lays of the Kirk and Covenant," —rather to the relief of her sisters, though they had made up their minds to listen to them respectfully, if it were necessary. In a little, therefore, Elly began to read, and Loulou went into the house, while Jim and Archy rolled over on the grass and prepared to find new occupations for themselves. Now was the time for Isabel to speak. But she felt her heart beating quickly, and it seemed that her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth.

"Do you want this?" said Elly, holding up a big old-fashioned volume of D'Aubigné's "History of the Reformation," which, indeed, Isabel had brought out for herself.

"Not just now. You can keep it," said Isabel, delighted that Elly had spoken, and only wishing she would go on. Anything seemed desirable now that would prove a hindrance to the fulfilment of her disagreeable duty. But Elly immediately dived again into her book, and Isabel shivered, wound her shawl closer about her, and called herself foolish and cowardly. Presently Dolly spoke.

"Isa, don't you sink it's time for Dollibella to begin to go to church?"

"No, dear Trotty, I think not," said Isabel; and Dolly too relapsed into silence. Jim and Archy did not talk, even to each other; it seemed that a spell-bound quietness had descended upon them all, as if to prevent Isabel having any excuse for putting off her lecture. Now for it, then.

Suddenly Elly sprang to her feet, and leaped high in the air, clasping the open book tight to her breast, while her whole face shone with delight. "Oh, what *have* I found! what *have* I found!"

Her excitement was infectious: Isabel, flushed and eager, tried to snatch the volume which Elly held fast; and Loulou, appearing at the window from within, loudly demanded what the matter was.

"Let me see, Elly! let me see! The book is mine."

But possession is nine-tenths of the law; and Elly clutched her treasure fast. "Listen, I'll read to you. Oh, it's glorious! Oh, it's beautiful! Just hear this:—Somebody says that the age of chivalry ended with the Reformation, but D'Aubigné says, No, it didn't. And, listen! here is his list of Protestant knights, and isn't it a good one? and doesn't he keep his best to the last?—'The brave and chivalrous La Noue, De Coligny, Sir Philip Sidney, and—*the brothers of the House of Orange-Nassau!*'"

The girls were all blushing with delight, as if the people thus praised had been—if not themselves—at least their near kindred. Isabel and Loulou must needs see the passage with their own eyes, and even Jim chuckled with satisfaction as they read it over again, while Elly only lamented that Cardinal Maggie was not at home to hear

the compliment paid to her illustrious contemporaries. It was the first time the children had found the beloved names mentioned in any book but the one in which Motley chronicled them; but henceforth a new interest was given to all histories or tales where the Dutch patriots might be favourably noticed, to the joy of their admirers at Abbotsmuir, or more coldly criticised, to their great indignation.

The enthusiasm about the subject had not, however, descended so low in the family as Archy, who now interrupted his sisters' ecstasies by inquiring rather indifferently, "Who was they yall?"

"All what?"

"Yese people in ye book."

"La Noue, and Coligny, and Sidney, and the brothers of the House of Orange-Nassau," said Isabel, pronouncing all the names tenderly, and the last as if they belonged to her. "They were all true knights, Archy."

"Not nights when the moon comes out," observed Jim, gravely, by way of explanation.

The girls smiled to each other, and perhaps Archy meditated, though there was not an expression of deep thought on his face.

Then Elly said, "I think they were good soldiers of Jesus Christ!" Her laughter was all gone, and there were depths of earnestness in her eyes. "And there are some like them now-a-days; aren't there, Isabel?"

"Rather a hackneyed idea that," said Loulou, turning away from the window.

But Isabel was saying in her heart, "Lord, help me! I'm not one of them."

"What's a hackneyed idea?" cried Elly. "That Christians are soldiers? Well, yes, it's an *old* one. The

Apostle Paul first took it into his head, I think; and that was about one thousand eight hundred years ago." She waited; but as Loulou very prudently made no answer, she turned round to Isabel with a triumphant little nod. "Had her there! I hope she heard."

Whether Loulou had given heed to the remark or not, Isabel had been deaf to it. The excitement about the treasure-trove had now subsided, but the afternoon was nearly over; already the clinking of tea-things sounded from within. Isabel felt it was now or never.

"Do you remember—," she began, in a trembling voice.

"Eh! what? Speak louder, speak louder," said Elly, whose gentle mood had been driven away during her tilting with Loulou.

"Do you remember how ill I was two years ago?"

She was not questioning any one in particular, but Elly made answer again with unpleasant sharpness. "I should think so. How cross you were when you were getting better!"

This was not exactly the view of the matter Isabel had wished to take, but she had the good sense to make the best she could of it. Courage was coming to her as she began to speak, and she was finding—as we so often do—that what she dreaded was not nearly so bad as the apprehension of it beforehand.

"Cross, was I?" said Isabel, rather amused than offended by Elly's plainness of speech. "So would you have been, I suspect, if you had been me. I had a weary, weary time of it. And yet, I suppose I wasn't very ill—I mean, I don't think they thought I was going to die. I never thought about dying myself.—Is Loulou there? I dare say she will say it's a 'hackneyed' remark; but when you're lying ill in bed, I think you are less inclined to—

think seriously than at any other time. For you are *so* weary, and nothing amuses you, and your head aches, and you're always too hot or too cold, and you get tired even of reading. And in the morning you wish it were night, and in the night you wish it were morning. Mammy sat beside me always, and papa looked in every now and then and said kind things; and Dandy, dear dog! came to my room always when he could get in. Oh me! I'm afraid I wasn't a bit grateful at the time, but I was *so* tired. The only excitement was when the doctor came. You others were never allowed to show your faces inside my door."

"We didn't like it either, I remember," said Elly, falling into the recollecting vein also, while Loulou came back to the window and listened sympathetically. "Mamma almost always stayed upstairs, and things weren't nice; and when she came down, she had always a sort of anxious, *unslept* face on. And papa used to sigh, and we had to keep quiet for you. We used to forget sometimes, and then papa was angry. So we read aloud constantly, Loulou and I, to each other and Jim."

"Yes, we found that was the best thing," said Loulou; "we used to go on for hours, one beginning when the other got hoarse. How we read! I think we went over all the story-books in the house, as well as the library ones we were allowed to read, before Isa was better again. No, it wasn't nice. It was a miserable time. I used to wonder often how the poor old girl upstairs was feeling too;"— and Loulou laid her hand caressingly on her sister's shoulder.

"I can't tell you, except that I was dreadfully tired," said Isabel. "Then, after I was getting better, there came that relapse; and that was very discouraging. I had

rather an idea, once on a time, that an illness was rather a pleasant thing on the whole; but when I had mine—oh, how I cried to be well again!"

"*Cried* to be well again!" repeated Elly, reproachfully. "*That* wouldn't do you much good. You should have *prayed*."

"Well, I did both," Isabel confessed. "I prayed to be well, perhaps harder than I ever prayed before in my life. If it had ever happened that I had been so foolish—" She paused for an instant, and then a strong tide of earnestness swept all hesitation away with it. "If I had ever been so foolish as to pray to be ill, what *could* I have thought—; what *could* I have done then? Nothing but say, God forgive me, for I knew not what I asked."

She had done her best, and it was over now. Isabel had not looked at her audience all the time she was speaking, nor did she do so when she had finished, though at that moment she was not afraid of them. The boys, lying on the grass, were grave enough to all appearance; but then they had got hold of the volume of D'Aubigné, and had turned to the portraits at the beginning, where Reformers and famous men of old looked out at them with solemn, bearded faces. Loulou and Elly had, of course, found out by this time for what purpose Isabel had been bringing up her memories of past illness; and Loulou was a little touched, and not at all contemptuous, though she privately thought that her own manner of giving a valuable lesson was much sharper, more impressive, and altogether better suited to the capacity of its object, than her sister's. As for Elly, it was never difficult to get on the soft side of her, and she was much moved by the account of Isabel's experiences, and the earnestness with which she dwelt on them. The apparent indifference of

the little brother intended to be benefited seemed to the one observant sister as sad and surprising as it was amusing and natural to the other.

Said Loulou, breaking the stillness at last, "It will be wet to-morrow. That clear, dark, *near* look on the hills means rain. You'll see if I'm not right."

And a new wave of feeling passed over Isabel, who rose and hastened to her room, overwhelmed with shame and self-consciousness. Until tea-time she shut herself up, and struggled in vain with the idea that she had made a terrible fool of herself. Almost every word she had said, with her eyes on the hills and the children listening around her, came back to her now to be branded as silly, ludicrous, or pretentious. Oh! that speech she had prepared so painfully, and delivered so earnestly, why did it torture her afterwards? She tried hard to console herself with the dreary commonplace that she would soon forget it, that all "would be the same" a week hence; but she could not feel sure of the truth even of this generally accepted fact, for her own follies, real and imaginary, had a terrible way of returning to her memory.

Meanwhile her sisters made their criticisms on what she had said, as they went off in search of Dolly, who had wandered away alone to another part of the garden.

"Isabel can say good things sometimes, can't she?" said Elly.

"Yes! that wasn't bad in itself," said Loulou in her cool, condescending way; "but all wasted. I am sure Archy neither understood nor cared."

Such was the opinion of Loulou, who was a person of considerable discrimination; and yet I, for my part, am not at all sure that Archy was so dull and careless as he seemed. My experience of small boys has generally been

that they are quicker, instead of slower, to understand, than their elders believe; and the oft-repeated remark about "little pitchers" was as applicable to the Abbotsmuir household as to any other I know.

But whether Archy had to thank Isabel or Loulou, or both of them, for bringing him to a better mind, one thing is certain: the idea that an illness was to be desired was henceforth abandoned by him. He made no more attempts to remain in bed, and no more complaints of weakness and fever; and it is also to be hoped that he put up no more such ill-judged petitions as the one which had moved his sister to distress and perplexity when she heard of it that Sunday morning.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW JIM RAN AWAY.

"Evil is wrought from want of thought,
As well as from want of heart."

HOOD.

THE next morning it began to rain. Mr. Booth walked off to the station in the midst of a terrible downpour, which he seemed to take as a personal insult, though the children were rather inclined to think he should admire the Abbotsmuir rain, because when it *did* come it was almost invariably very heavy and thoroughly wetting. "It's best to rain properly and have done with it," was a favourite saying of the young Maitlands; but, unfortunately, the having "done with it" did not always come soon, however "proper" the rain might be. It not unfrequently happened that the natives themselves were thoroughly tired of dull skies and wet weather before the sun shone out and drove the mist from the hills. On this occasion the rain continued, not only all the day on which Mr. Booth left, but for three days afterwards.

The girls bore their confinement to the house extremely well, however. The weather had been so long fine that variety was rather pleasing at first; and when they were not able to go out, they had all the more time for Motley. Isabel would sit curled up on the sofa, reading on de-

lightedly for hours; while Loulou made additions to Dollibella's already extensive wardrobe; and Elly, generally on the floor at their feet, employed herself with curious inventions in knitting, which was the only handiwork she had any natural liking for.

They were in the midst of the war in the Netherlands now; and after mourning the fate of Loulou's chosen hero and the other brave young "brothers of the House of Orange-Nassau," had read of the failure of one patriotic attempt after another, till their ever-increasing interest and disappointment nearly overpowered them at last over the story of the long sad siege of Haarlem. They had a breathing-space from horrors after that, and no little rejoicing over the check given to the Spaniards at Alkmaar; and yet when Leyden was invested, they scarcely dared to hope that success would crown the cause of freedom, and prepared themselves sorrowfully for another tragedy. Too loyal to each other, and to their own ideas of the honour due to a story, to give even a peep forward to see what the end might be, the three girls in the manse dining-room once more bore sympathetic part in the desperate bravery and pathetic endurance with which the Dutch burghers fought foe and famine. Their childish hearts felt something of the agony of suspense and longing which sent the Leydeners day after day up to the ancient tower of Hengist to watch for the sea-waters sweeping over the fields to their aid; and forgetting in their excitement that all was in the past, Isabel and Elly again put up the prayer, made and answered three centuries ago, that God would send his west wind out of heaven, and let the ships of William of Orange sail to the gates of the noble town. Well, that terrible tale came at last to an end, which was almost as good as heart could wish; and even Loulou cried a little

over the blessed deliverance, though the three were all ready enough to make merry afterwards over the festivities and allegories with which the honest citizens founded their university and celebrated their triumph.

The "Families" were left rather in abeyance at this time, but by no means neglected. Poor Harry's position as a page at court was quite uncomfortable enough to make him interesting; and Isabel spent a good deal of trouble in arranging different appearances and characters for the little fair-haired princesses, daughters of Edward the Fourth and Elizabeth Woodville, who were to be represented as very tender and pitiful to the forlorn young Lancastrian. When she had managed this so that Loulou and Elly, instead of scoffing, actually agreed that the introduction of these little ladies and their mother gave more piquancy to the situation than it had had for long, the story-teller was indeed a proud and happy girl.

Elly, meanwhile, had finished her account of the Future Fortunes of the Maitland Family, because she had finished the note-book in which she was writing it, and, as yet, the young authoress composed her works according to her paper. The "historical novel" she had begun in the twin-volume brought by Maggie from the town had not proved so successful—or at least she had tired of it sooner—so the written leaves were summarily torn out, and she and Loulou made a new title-page, and commenced a joint-work. This new story gave all the girls great amusement, though it is doubtful whether it would have gained the approval of their good grandmamma in Edinburgh, for it bore an unmistakable, though burlesque, resemblance in style to some of the favourite tales of her own youth, which she had lent as precious treasures to the Maitlands lately. Their mother had taken the books back to their

owner when she went away; and, afterwards, Elly had been much troubled by the idea that the message of thanks the girls sent with them ought truthfully to have been accompanied by the information that they had only enjoyed granny's stories because they found them so laughable! Her sisters had considerable difficulty in persuading her that it was not necessary, or advisable, to write and explain; and the only argument that had much weight with her was Isabel's, when she urged, that if mamma thought their feelings on the subject ought to be known, she would be quite able to tell them, and quite certain to do it. But Elly's remorse and perplexity did not prevent her entering with great zest into Loulou's plans for the story of the luxury-loving city children — Master Adolphus, Master Conrad, and Miss Amelia Fitzgerald—who set out with their maid Betty in the family coach, to pay a visit to their country cousins,—the children of Aunt Dorcas and Uncle Habbakuk,—at their salubrious country residence of Correction Cottage.

Loulou had seldom been known to write anything which her sisters would have called "intending to be sensible;" indeed, she wrote very little at all, feeling that her tastes and capacities were better suited to criticism than any other literary work. But the idea of this story pleased her somewhat irreverent mind, and her ready memory kept her abundantly supplied with stilted sentences to imitate, and old-fashioned phrases and turns of speech which sounded strange to modern ears. So she and Elly went on busily with their tale, while Isabel gave her help only by attentive hearing and flattering laughter. After all, their amusement was innocent enough, as there was no chance of their composition ever offending the eyes of the kind old lady, to whom the quaint Old World tales that her grand-

children mimicked were all illuminated with the golden light of early days.

In this manner the elder girls were happy and full of occupation all through the wet weather. As for Dolly, never was child or kitten more easily amused than she; and gladdened by one new doll's garment after another coming in rapid succession from the skilful fingers of Loulou, she bore her confinement to the house extremely well. Not so the boys, however. The rooms and lobbies were too small for active games on such a scale as to amuse them long; and if it did happen that they found some diversion which promised pleasure, Destiny, in the form of Susan or Loulou, was sure to blast their hopes, on the ground that they were doing mischief to themselves or something else. Occasionally they became desperate, and went out into the rain; but their experiences during those dreary expeditions were scarcely more pleasant than the scolding, and complete changing of garments which had to be endured when they came home.

It may be said that their sisters ought to have devised some amusements for them; and so they were willing and even anxious to do, but Jim and Archy preferred their own unrestrained idleness, dull as it was, to any employments that were suggested to them. And perhaps, in the circumstances, it would have been wise to have allowed them their choice; but that, Isabel and Loulou thought, would have been letting *ill* alone, which no proverb has ever yet pronounced it best to do. Therefore the girls decided that if Jim and Archy would not play, they must be made to work; if they would not have nice quiet games, they must have nice quiet lessons. The instructions in writing, spelling, and the multiplication table, which the boys had formerly received in the mornings from Loulou,

were now to be supplemented by others in French and history, given by Isabel. The new teacher was quite enthusiastic about her work beforehand: she loved history; she was proud of her knowledge of French; and she felt eager to impart what she knew. But the very first trial of the new plan brought a terrible storm. The boys howled and protested till Isabel was thoroughly frightened; and she was glad at last to close the French lesson, whenever her pupils had so far yielded as to make a slight pretence of repeating after her the half-dozen words she had intended to imprint upon their memories. Then Archy was allowed to go, while his brother was forcibly detained to learn his history.

Now, Jim read and loved the "Tales of a Grandfather," and would listen with eager interest to Motley's "Rise of the Dutch Republic;" but to study a chapter of "Little Arthur's History of England," and afterwards answer questions upon it, was a thing that was utterly distasteful to him. It is probable that Isabel alone would not have insisted upon her orders being carried out when she saw how unpleasant they were; but Loulou came to back her, and Jim's submission was then a mere question of time. He was locked into the study with his sisters, and informed that there was no escape for him till his lesson was properly finished; so that all he could do by way of revenge was to make the imprisonment, which they had to share, a lengthy one. Of course, however, he punished himself a great deal more than he punished them, when he chose to spend nearly the whole forenoon over the task, which could have been easily completed in twenty minutes.

"We're not going to waste another morning upon you," said Loulou, taking the key from her pocket to open the door at last. "You will learn your lessons to-morrow in

the forenoon, and take as long about them as you like; but we'll not hear you till the afternoon."

"I'm going to run away!" said Jim, glaring at her.

Loulou laughed, as she flung the door wide. "Off you go, then! The sooner the better!" said she.

She was very triumphant over this second victory won against boyish obstinacy, and took all the credit of it to herself, as she felt sure that Isabel never would have had the courage to fight to the end. Jim's threat gave her no uneasiness whatever. The idea of "running away" had been familiar to them all in their time, and was, indeed, what she would have called *hackneyed*. Elly, in bygone days, had twice set off into the wide world to seek her fortune, and had once got so far on her way as the garden gate; on the other occasion, her courage had failed her when she unlatched the kitchen door. So Isabel and Loulou, forgetting Jim's words for the time being, hastened off to their own affairs, and felt by no means concerned, although their brother kept away from them as much as possible during the rest of the day.

Next morning the clouds broke, and the sun shone out again. Gradually and slowly the mist rolled off the hills, which had scarcely been seen for days, and were now greeted gladly by the children, as they assembled round the breakfast-table. Lessons went on smoothly enough in the ordinary way, the French and history being relegated to the afternoon, so that the girls might not again be balked of their own morning reading. Archy received his directions about what was to be done with a half-whimper; Jim scowled, and, immediately on leaving the dining-room, he set out to "run away."

This he did with all possible openness and deliberation, having all his plans arranged beforehand. He buttoned

himself up in his greatcoat, and walked calmly through the back premises, and past the church, in full view of Archy and Dolly gazing down admiringly from the nursery, and Loulou and Elly scoffing at the side window of the dining-room.

"He's going to run away!" said the one sister to the other; and then both inquired whither he was bound.

Jim, of course, made no answer, but marched on with an appearance of great stolidity.

"Make for a town where there are bells," they advised him. "There's one in the Methwell church, and another in the school. Bells say fine things sometimes to run-away boys. Be sure to sit down on a stone and listen to them." And as Jim reached the gate, he heard Elly, who had a very deep and strong voice for a girl of her years, singing after him in her most powerful bass, "Turn again, Maitland, provost of Methwell!"

But Jim did not take the road which led through their own village, and then wound for five long miles, through woods and moors, to Methwell and the railway station. He turned down the burn, as he might have done any day; only, instead of dawdling and looking about him as usual, he walked with rapid steps and a business-like air along the narrow pathway. Arrived at the river, he halted; and sitting down on the stones where Isabel had waited so wistfully for Loulou's home-coming, he pulled off his shoes and stockings. Then he plunged into the burn, and waded back towards the manse. Jim had been reading "Uncle Tom's Cabin" not long before, and had arranged the plan of his flight on the model of Cassy and Emmeline's.

When he had walked long enough in the water, according to his own ideas, to put even bloodhounds off the scent, Jim took to dry ground, and resumed his stockings again.

Very cautiously he crept along underneath the garden hedge, feeling much afraid of meeting Archy, who, though sympathetic, had been judged too young and timid to be trusted with the mighty secret of his plans. But fortune seemed to favour Jim; for, as he peeped round the corner, he caught sight of his little brother and sister, walking one on each side of Susan, with their backs turned to him, and their intentions evidently fixed on the village shop. Jim waited until they had disappeared, and then stole into the garden, and along the way he had come, but walking on the grass borders with his boots in his hand, and stooping to let the shrubs conceal him as much as possible. He was not so much afraid of his sisters discovering him as he had been of Archy, for he thought it probable they were all too busily occupied to look out, or listen to what was going on in the garden; yet his heart beat quickly as he passed under the open dining-room window. And the girls were not reading, after all: Isabel was doing her practising, while Loulou and Elly were apparently busy with their story. Jim heard Elly's voice saying, "'Oh, Betty,' cried Miss Amelia;" and then came the rapid scratching of her pen.

"Be sure to write 'miss' with a little 'm,'" said Loulou. "You'll see that in all old books.—Hush! was that some one coming to the back-door? Susan's out, and I'm sure I heard a noise."

Jim had not been able to get across the court-yard quite silently; but as the noise of footsteps was not followed by knocking, the girls decided that it had been made by Dandy, and went on with their writing. Jim therefore reached the stable unobserved, and ascended from thence by a ladder into the unused hay-loft above. He had already carried up by stealth such articles as he thought necessary to make a few days' residence there exceedingly

comfortable, and now he surveyed his preparations with great satisfaction. An old shawl was spread in a corner behind a packing-box; and for provisions he had a parcel of cakes and a pitcher of water. He had a candle too, bought, as the gingerbread had been, with his own money at the village grocer's; for it did not suit Jim's ideas of honesty to rob the manse, as Cassy had done the house of Legree. The shawl was one the children were allowed to play with, and he only meant to take the loan of it from the others for a little while, until he left Abbotsmuir altogether. For entertainment of the mind, he had two large volumes of fairy tales, which were entirely his own property; and some pictures and story-books suitable for Sunday, in which Archy had a share. But these last were to be left behind next week, when Jim went out into the world. On Monday, he calculated, all search for him would be over, and he might safely set off in the early morning, to go where he chose.

Jim's plans for the future were not yet quite matured. He knew, of course, that boys who ran away generally went to sea; but he also knew that they had hard work, and were not very kindly treated, besides being almost invariably shipwrecked at the end of their story. Moreover, Jim was apt to be sick in a boat, and even on the swing; so that he had never fancied himself cut out for a sailor life. Selling in a shop was what he often thought of as an agreeable occupation; but he feared he was scarcely big enough yet to be trusted to weigh out tea or measure cloth, and the position of errand-boy did not commend itself much to him. On the whole, he thought that going in the train and selling newspapers was his vocation. Of course, it would have been far finer to have a menagerie of his own, and travel about the country in a van; or

even to be an engine-driver, and manage the puffing, hissing "iron horse." But Jim knew that such pleasures pertained only to manhood. And the career of a news-boy was by no means to be despised. Jim had often admired the laughing, impudent-faced little fellows, with smart lettered caps, and leathern bags over their shoulders, who shouted the names of their papers in shrill tones at every station, and then sprang into a carriage so daringly, just at the last moment, and with a familiar confidence that seemed to show they felt the whole train their own.

Jim, lying on his back on the floor of the loft, rehearsed in imagination the scenes of his future life, and munched gingerbread the while. He was very much pleased with the success of his plans hitherto, and had little doubt that all would continue to go well with him; but if it *did* happen that he disliked his new trade, he could easily give up his situation at the end of a month, and return home. Papa and mamma would be at Abbotsmuir again then, and doubtless glad enough to see Jim back again with his wages in his pocket. Isabel and Loulou would be sure to apologize for their behaviour to him; and if they seemed truly contrite, he might buy them a present out of his earnings. He did not feel angry with his sisters now; his good-humour had been quite restored by the consciousness of his own courage and skill in defying and outwitting them.

Jim heard noises sometimes in the court-yard beneath, but not distinctly enough to catch the words, except when Archy and Dolly shouted to each other. He never heard anything about himself, or could in any way guess when he was missed, and whether he was ever searched for. Certainly no one opened the stable door; which was rather surprising to Jim, although he had never expected his re-

treat to be invaded. There was nothing to take the girls or Susan up to the loft, and Archy was as much afraid of the gloomy place as ever Legree was of the garret in his house; but in the stable there were sticks kept, and Jim was rather disappointed that they did not seem to be needed that day. He thought it would have been amusing to peep down upon Susan rummaging below, all unconscious of his neighbourhood; but when that pleasure was denied him, he comforted himself by thinking that it would have been rather a risky one. When he was tired of meditating, he took his books, and read tale after tale in the twilight, which reigned in the loft even while the day was high. Of course, the twilight changed into darkness in the course of time; but Jim was all eagerness to light his candle, and nestle beside it in the corner behind the packing-box. It was quite a pleasure in itself to see how brightly it blazed; but after a time that satisfaction palled, and Jim began to get sleepy—so sleepy that he was sure it must be very late at night. He blew out his candle, and put on his greatcoat again, wrapped himself up in the shawl, and fell fast asleep.

Every one in the village knew by that time that the minister's little boy was missing. His sisters had not been very quick to take alarm, however. All forenoon they scarcely thought of Jim; and when he did not put in an appearance at dinner, they were rather angry than anxious. He should do his lessons, they vowed, whenever he reappeared, although it might be nearly tea-time; and they were glad enough to make waiting for him an excuse for not going out for a walk. But as time passed on and he never came, Isabel and Loulou became uneasy, though they did not like to confess it to each other. They made little expeditions to the upper windows and the garden gate

to look out for the wanderer; they cross-questioned Archy, who knew no more of Jim's movements than they did; and they consulted Susan, who thought it best to go and inquire if the neighbours had seen him.

When four o'clock struck, the girls suddenly realized with horror that Jim had been away for five hours, and that no one knew anything about him during that time. He had not played at all with Archy and Dolly; he had not been in the village; he had certainly never re-entered the house, since he marched defiantly past the dining-room window with his coat on and his cap pulled over his eyes.

"Let us all go out different ways and look for him," said Isabel, with a white, scared face.

Then, to the surprise of all, Loulou suddenly burst out crying. "This is all my fault," she said. It was not that she was taking guilt to herself for scoffing at Jim's threat, or for being too long in realizing that he had fulfilled it. It was because Loulou felt that it was she who had set the example of staying away from home for hours. Thinking Jim might have carried out her idea to the letter, she went over the bridge to the Abbotsmuir grounds, and trudged about among the wet moss and blaeberry bushes, seeking him in all the places where she had been a week ago, and making the woods ring with the sound of her little brother's name. She only turned homewards when the thought occurred to her that the truant might have arrived at the manse before her.

Isabel's fear was the river; and though she derived some consolation from the fact that the fishing-rods were in their place at home, she took Dolly with her, and wandered up and down the waterside—struggling with the terrible thought that if Jim *had* fallen in, there

was nothing she or any one else could do to help him now.

It was a comfort that Susan's view of the matter was persistently hopeful. According to her, Jim had made his way somehow to Methwell, with the intention of meeting Maggie, who was expected by the afternoon train; and there was no doubt he would return with her, safe and sound, and very proud of having taken such a long walk by himself. Nevertheless Susan joined in the search, and took the Methwell road for her beat, stopping every one she met to ask about Jim; though, after all, that did not mean consulting very many people.

Elly and Archy kept house at home. And about seven o'clock the seekers had a dismal reunion in the manse, when they made known to one another that nothing had been seen or heard of the lost child, and that it was evident Maggie had not been able to come by the afternoon train. This last fact was natural enough, and would have excited no dismay in ordinary circumstances, but in the present state of things it seemed almost heart-breaking. Susan still spoke cheerfully, but the girls began to suspect that her words and thoughts were not alike; and without waiting for tea, they went forth again—with heavier steps this time, and heavier hearts.

Back went Isabel to the banks of the river; while Loulou recrossed the bridge, to tell her trouble and make inquiries at the castle, where the gamekeeper's family were the only tenants just now. Susan once more turned towards Methwell, determined to go the whole way this time. And as the evening went on, the young Rays, and other villagers who had returned from their work, volunteered to join in the search. The little ones stayed at home together, frightened and sorrowful, though not with-

out plenty of excitement, and a feeling of their own importance; for inquirers of all sorts came to ask if they had any news of their brother, and they had orders to ring the church bell as a signal when Jim himself was brought back again.

CHAPTER XIV.

JIM'S HIDING-PLACE.

"And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling—
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, gray rats, tawny rats."

ROBERT BROWNING.

JIM had long been famous as the soundest sleeper of the family, and he certainly justified his reputation when he was in the loft; for cold and hard as his couch was, he slept on it for hours. Moving at last to turn round, he brought one hand with such a rap against the side of the box, that he found himself wakened suddenly, and most unpleasantly, into consciousness. At first he was bewildered, and unable to remember where he was; feeling in vain for Archy beside him, and trying to cover himself with imaginary blankets, while he pondered over the strange fact of his being in bed with his clothes on. But gradually everything came back to him, and Jim sat up in his strange resting-place, and surveyed the situation.

It is wonderful what changes in our feelings and opinions a long sleep can make. Jim's plans seemed to him now not grand, but foolish; the loft had been transformed from a romantic place of security into a dismal

prison. He would fain have purchased a return to the house and his usual manner of life by any amount of submission to his sisters; but it was the middle of the night now, he thought,—everybody at home would be in bed and asleep. Curiously enough, considering his late behaviour, Jim made up his mind at once that he had no right to disturb them; and yet such a way of looking at things was characteristic of the boy, who was ever independent and self-restrained, and very chary of giving trouble. For it must be remembered that Jim had no idea of the long search which had been made for him, and the bitter sorrow his loss had caused. He had hoped that Isabel and Loulou would be mortified, and Archy and Dolly admiring and envious, when they found he was gone; but beyond that, his expectations of making a sensation had certainly never soared.

In the loft it was very dark. All around Jim there was gloom, except where the faintest white beam came through the skylight, and fell on the floor beneath. Jim was a very brave boy: he had sat there all alone in the twilight shadows, and not felt it eerie, though to the other children there would have been dreadful possibilities, even then, in the obscurity of the corners. But now a chill from the darkness and the silence struck to his very heart. He tried to think it was only his hands that were cold, and began rubbing them together to warm them—poor little stiff, dirty fingers, some of them aching still from the violence of their contact with the side of the packing-box. Then a happy thought struck him, and he groped for his candle, which he found easily enough; and for the matches, which he sought for in vain. That precious, well-filled box, bought with his own money, and carried to the loft so triumphantly—where had it gone to now?

Jim felt eagerly around with hands and feet, until he heard, to his great excitement and dismay, what seemed an answering scrape, as if somebody else were hunting for matches, or had even got hold of them. For one moment, as he crouched in stillness and the tension of listening, Jim fancied that the sound came from the attempted striking of a match. But no! the rasping noise went on continuously, and then suddenly there was a rumbling and tumbling overhead, a crashing and scraping in the walls, and something that sounded terribly like the scamper of feet over the floor.

Rats! Jim beat the boards round about him, and flung books and water-can in the direction the latest sounds came from, in his first instinctive desire to be himself as noisy as possible. Then there was silence about him for a while, and he too sat still, and tried hard to think that the fellow-tenants of his garret were nothing worse than mice after all. If that were the case, there was no need to be afraid. Jim had heard from Isabel of the wicked Bishop of Bingen, but he privately entertained a strong disbelief in the story, although it had been a little shaken by the news that papa and mamma had actually seen the Mouse-tower on the Rhine. At any rate, he had no dread of the tiny, bright-eyed creatures he and Archy had so often watched; indeed, he was always sorry when he heard of any of them perishing under the claws of pussy or by the wires of a trap. But *rats!* They had been known to attack even grown men; they were mysterious, half-fiendish animals, with unknown possibilities of cruelty and strength in their gleaming eyes and sharp teeth. Substitute rats for mice in the old German legend, and Bishop Hatto's fate became at once comprehensible. And now Jim remembered hearing Susan say that she had seen a rat in the stable

lately. Oh, hideous memory! For if there were rats in the stable haunted by men, how much more likely would there be rats in the desolate and forsaken loft? If one of these creatures dared to appear in the daylight, how many might not come out in the hours of darkness? Jim's blood ran cold as he fancied them trooping across the floor to him—a host of fierce, hungry animals, against whom he would have to fight, single-handed, for his life.

The noises began again, and seemed to come nearer now. Jim sought no more for his matches; he flung the candle and his parcel of cakes to the other end of the loft, fearing they might serve as temptations to draw the rats to his corner. Let them feast on the provisions as much as they liked; Jim would be only too glad if they would spare the owner! He sat up in intense watchfulness, with clenched fists and listening ears, hearing the slightest noise that was made in the loft, and doubtless others which only sounded in his own brain. At last the climax came. Close beside him in the sloping roof—whether inside or outside he knew not—there was heard again the scrambling and tumbling that had filled him with horror before. Suddenly and loudly it broke on his ears, and all Jim's fortitude gave way. With an inarticulate sound of terror, which was half a gasp and half a cry, he crawled from behind his box, kicking desperately out behind him. He would stay in the loft no longer; he would fly out into the night. Consideration for the slumbers of his family was out of the question now; he would wake them up and get into the house, if he could; and if not, he would stay till morning in the garden—at the burn-side—anywhere but here! Half across the floor he got, and then there came a thought which seemed to paralyze his

limbs and make his heart stop beating. Susan always turned the key in the stable door before she went to bed. There was no hope of flight for Jim; he was locked up with the rats!

In the agony of that moment he cried out, though with no hope of help; a despairing cry, loud and long and wild. It rang through the loft, and out into the night. And as it died away, there came an answering sound; but not of rats this time—for how could rats fumble at a lock? To Jim's astonishment the stable door opened, and a voice called eagerly for some one to bring a light; and then went up into the loft in tremulous inquiry, —"My Jim! O my Jim! are you there?"

The voice was Isabel's, and she herself stood at the foot of the ladder, though how she happened to be awake in the dead of the night, and how she dared venture alone into the ghostly and rat haunted darkness of the stable, was more than Jim could understand.

"I'm here," he answered meekly from above, as he crawled to the trap-door, with a blessed sense of human neighbourhood and sympathy stealing into his heart.

Then a light appeared, carried by Loulou, and cast a flickering radiance on the pale, anxious faces of the sisters, who stood below. They were all completely dressed; their big hats looking black in the darkness around, and their light prints shining almost weirdly white, as they held the candle high to enable Jim to descend the ladder. "Are you safe? Are you well?" were the only questions they asked at first.

Jim answered, "Yes;" and then he heard Loulou say something that sounded very like "Thank God."

As he touched the stable floor, Elly came running in with an eager cry, "Have you got him?" and immediately

JIM IS FOUND.

flung herself laughing and sobbing on his neck. "O my boy! are you alive? Are you safe and sound after all?"

He passed out into the open air, and all was not dark as he had expected, but only the chill twilight of a damp summer evening. Jim rubbed his eyes, and standing still in the court-yard, drew a long, long breath. "I fell asleep up there," he said slowly. "I wakened up. There were rats!" He shuddered as he thought of the place where he had been; and his sisters, every one of them, shuddered too.

"*That* was why you screamed? Oh, you poor boy! no wonder. You dear boy, come home and get warm!" And so, amidst pity and jubilation, Jim was led back to the house.

They poked the kitchen fire into a blaze, and set him on a chair in front of it. Loulou pulled off his shoes and stockings, and rubbed his cold feet, while Isabel brought him a slice of bread and jam, and a cup of milk. Then, as Jim sat silently eating and drinking, and warming himself, Elly ran out again with a sudden exclamation, and presently the church-bell began to ring in queer irregular peals. Jim stared; but he had seen and heard so much to puzzle him since he came out of his retreat, that he was not so much astonished as might have been expected. After a little, his eyes wandered to the big clock in the corner, whose figures were distinctly visible in the fire-light. "Ten minutes past ten!" said Jim in surprise. "It must be to-morrow night."

"No," answered Loulou, laughing hysterically; "it's to-night."

"It's been an awful long day!" said Jim with a sigh.

After that he felt that nothing could surprise him any more, and he took it very coolly when Archy appeared from the garden—Archy, whose bed time was eight o'clock.

The younger brother came slowly into the kitchen, and gazed with awe upon the wonderful boy who had baffled all search for so many hours, and might have been safely hidden still if he had not chosen to betray himself. Archy had heard the story from Elly, and had no questions to ask—at least in public. Certainly Jim gave him no encouragement to do so. He turned away again from Archy, and looked at his sisters. Isabel had seated herself on the floor, and was leaning her head on the side of the fire-place, as if too weary to rise again; while Loulou, kneeling at her brother's feet, was in scarcely more lively case, her cheeks pale, and her dress wet and untidy. Jim was making out by slow degrees from their talk what they had been about all evening, and how they had returned from their search but a few minutes ago, in the hope of finding that he himself, or news of him, had been brought from Methwell. They had arrived before Maggie and Susan: but it was well they came then, Loulou said, for Jim's unearthly cry had greeted their ears as they entered the yard, and it was she who had guessed where it came from.

"Your pig-tails is came undid, Loulou," observed Jim, in a pause of the conversation.

"Are they?" said she indifferently, as she put back her hand to feel. "So they are. My ribbon's gone. I suppose it will be sticking to some bush on the other side of the water."

I am not sure that Jim did not think this the strangest thing that had happened on all that strange evening. For his sake Loulou had forgotten her attire, and heeded not the plaiting of her much-prized hair! Some branch in the woods had twitched off her ribbon, and she never knew it, but walked on, all unknowing and uncaring that her

locks were loose. Jim felt a queer lump in his throat, and a mist in his eyes; which, however, he succeeded in dispelling by turning savagely round upon his brother, and asking him what he was "glowering" at. Whereupon Archy very prudently took himself off, and ran to assist Elly to ring the bell, and look out for Susan and Maggie.

The two servants were very near the village now, though, oddly enough, they had but lately joined company, having missed each other among the numerous by-paths and short-cuts which might be taken between Methwell and Abbotsmuir. Therefore Maggie only heard of Jim's loss when the peal of the bell announced that he had been found; and while Susan's heart filled with thankfulness, hers swelled with indignation. She had felt nothing of the long and ever-increasing anxiety that had softened the others towards the culprit, and made them able to think of nothing now but the joy of getting him back again. The view that Maggie took of the matter was that Jim had disgraced the name he bore. The minister's son had run away, and all the neighbourhood knew it. Of course Abbotsmuir was not quite the whole world, for the village where Maggie's mother lived was not there; but the most important part of the globe lay around the Maitlands' manse, and the minister was the most important person in it. Better than all the children put together, Maggie loved their father; and it was the dishonour done to him that roused her wrath that day.

Before the two reached the garden gate, Archy came dancing and skipping out in delighted excitement, to tell the end of the tale which had threatened to be so tragic. And in front of the church door Elly was standing, with flushed cheeks and uncovered head, tugging at the bell-

rope with might and main, and chanting in measured tones to the accompaniment of the clamour above, "Found in the loft! Safe in the loft! Jim in the loft!"

To Maggie the whole state of things appeared disreputable in the extreme. "Stop that, Elly," she said severely to the bell-ringer; then, leaving Susan to talk with her and Archy, she marched with determined strides to the kitchen door. Jim still sat stolid and silent before the fire; his sisters on the floor at his feet petting him and talking to each other.

"O Maggie!" cried the girls, rising up in eager welcome as she appeared.

But Maggie, heeding them not, went straight to Jim and seized him by the arm. "So this is the way you go on when your papa and mamma's away," said she. "My lad! you'll get the soundest thrashing you ever got in your life!"

And she kept her word. To the bitter grief of the girls, and the blank dismay of Archy, she dragged Jim upstairs, and inflicted summary and severe chastisement upon him. It was a terrible surprise for them all; and the only one who did not break forth into tears, entreaties, and reproaches, was Jim himself. He bore his punishment unresistingly, and with Spartan fortitude. I am inclined to think the reason was that he felt he thoroughly deserved it.

After that, Maggie moved about in a state of silent and controlled anger, which was very awful. Even Elly's inquiries about her mother, and congratulations on her recovery, only brought out an expression of bitter regret that she had ever left Abbotsmuir; which was naturally very mortifying to Susan and the girls, who interpreted the speech as a reproof to themselves. Still, as Maggie

set the house in order, prepared supper for the weary girls, and undressed Archy and Dolly (the latter had been found asleep on the top of her crib with all her clothes on), Isabel and Loulou could not but feel that it was good to have her back again, if only to take off the responsibility which had weighed so heavily upon their shoulders. And next morning, when she decreed that Jim's punishment was not yet over, and that he must lie in bed the most of the day, his sisters dared not object, not only because they were afraid of offending Maggie, but because they felt that they had managed Jim so badly themselves that they had no right to interfere with any other person's way of doing it.

Jim heard his sentence without the least manifestation of resentment; and all forenoon he lay alone in his room, gazing upward with grave blue eyes, and meditating as deeply as he had done in the loft the day before, but, let us hope, more profitably. When the door was unlocked, and his clothes brought back to him, he took his liberty as calmly as he had taken his imprisonment. He made his toilet with the utmost deliberation; and then, making sure he was unobserved, he slipped out of the house and again betook himself to the loft. Just inside the trap-door he stood still, and surveyed the scene of last night's adventures. There were his books on the floor where he had thrown them; some of their leaves crumpled and their boards loosened by the violence of their fall, but otherwise none the worse. There were his cakes and his candle, looking very much as they had done when he saw them last. After all, then, his ideas of the hungry legions coming to attack him had been visions caused by darkness and terror: Jim began to think now that he might have counted his foes by units last night.

Carefully he gathered up his possessions, even finding the lost matches in the corner behind the packing-box, where they had eluded his panic-stricken search last night. Then Jim departed, a sadder and a wiser boy than he had been the day before; and, as he went, he made a vow, that no temptations of hide-and-seek, and no weariness of the house on rainy days, would ever bring him to that loft again.

He had more to do yet, however, before he could forget his unlucky escapade. First he went to the plot of garden ground which was called his own, and there he dug a hole, and buried the cakes, the matches, and the candle, under the earth, where he would never see them more. Afterwards he carried the other things back to their places in the house. But even then he did not join his sisters, who, knowing now that he was free, were awaiting him rather anxiously in the dining-room. They were uneasy, every one of them, lest Maggie's severity should have goaded him into running away again, and doing the thing thoroughly this time. And yet, so sympathetic were they with the wounded pride and sense of disgrace they were sure he must feel, that not one would venture to watch his motions, even though the peeping and prying might be all for his own good.

At last Jim came. He walked suddenly into the dining-room, and the embarrassment was entirely on the side of his sisters, who blushed and looked shyly at each other, while he was calm as usual. "Hall's First French Course" was tucked under his arm, and "Little Arthur's History" was open in his hand. "I'm ready now," said he, holding out the book to Isabel.

She stared at him blankly, and Loulou ceased cutting bread at the table to turn and stare at him too. Isabel

thought his ideas of time were as confused as they had been last night, and tried to explain matters accordingly.

"But this is Saturday, Jim. There are no lessons to-day; don't you remember?"

Jim made the slightest movement of mild impatience. It was Isabel who was bewildered and slow of comprehension in this affair, and not he.

"I didn't say them yesterday," said Jim.

Then they understood him. This was Jim's way of acknowledging his fault and promising amendment; and who shall say it was not as good as any protestations could have been? The girls, chatterers as they were and demonstrative by nature, were not slow to appreciate the worth of a repentance which was manifesting itself by deeds instead of words, and their hearts all went out lovingly to Jim in answer to his mute tender of reconciliation. None of them hugged him or kissed him, however; they believed he would not like it, and the feelings of this little brother of theirs, with the plump, placid face, and remarkable powers of silence, had assumed a new and grave importance in their estimation. They had been wont to class him with Archy and Dolly, in kindly contempt, as one of the "little ones;" but Jim, in his consciousness of his own folly, and fortitude in enduring the punishment of it, had suddenly established his claim to be considered a reasonable and responsible being, like themselves.

All this the girls felt, more or less vaguely, as he said his lessons to Isabel—first the chapter of history, and then the list of French words—carefully and correctly. The teacher was very glad to shut the books at last. "That's very well," said she. "Now, won't you go and tell Archy and Dolly that it's tea-time?"

So the difficult interview was brought to an end, and they all felt that the next thing to be done was to ignore all past unpleasantness, and let bygones be bygones, as far as that was possible. Isabel and Loulou agreed, there and then, that the extra lessons should be given up. Now that the respect due to their authority had been fully paid, they could afford to confess that the attempt to hurry on the boys' education had been unwise; and their decision being warmly applauded by Elly, they proceeded to act upon it immediately. Before Jim and the little ones came in from the garden, "Hall's First French Course," and "Little Arthur's History of England," had been consigned to a press where old and unused books were kept; and the girls had piled a heap of dusty volumes above them, with as much satisfaction as Jim had felt, when he shovelled the earth upon his matches, cakes, and candle, of most unpleasant memory.

CHAPTER XV.

WAITING.

"I wait for my story—the birds cannot sing it,
Not one, as he sits on the tree;
The bells cannot ring it; but, long years, oh bring it!
Such as I wish it to be."

JEAN INGELOW.

"I RATHER think I ought to go and see old Sarah to-day," said Isabel to her sisters on Monday afternoon.

The girls were in excellent spirits, having now parted from their last probationer, who, after all, had been as little of a trouble as it was possible for a probationer to be in the circumstances. Very young he was, very gentle and very modest, and evidently as much afraid of the children as they were of him. Isabel was quite ready to acknowledge his virtues now that he was gone, and no more lonely Sundays and strange preachers lay between her and her father's home-coming. Then Maggie had volunteered to take the little ones to the river; which had caused exquisite joy to the boys and considerable relief to their sisters. Isabel, Loulou, and Elly, as they sauntered out of the manse garden together, made up their minds they should have a pleasant afternoon, free from anxiety, free from responsibility, and very full of story-telling.

To walk to blind Sarah's cottage was as good as going

anywhere else—at least to Loulou and Elly, who had no intentions of entering. One visit Isabel had already paid to the old woman, and it had not been nearly so disagreeable as she had expected, for Sarah was clean and kind, and evidently glad to be read to. Of course she was not half so entertaining as the old mother of the castle gamekeeper, with her famous story about the Miss Mackenzie of her youth, who shut herself up in her room for years and years, and then suddenly came out, and went off on a tour through cannibal countries. The girls delighted in visiting the Leslies, only for the purpose of making the old woman tell of Miss Mackenzie's adventures; and she always roused into animation as she described how narrowly the beautiful lady escaped being herself made a supper of, in the inn where she intended to tarry for the night. Much food for conversation had this tale given to the manse children, who were never tired of speculating how much of it could possibly be true, or how it had come to pass that the narrator believed it so thoroughly. But, of course, it was not to be expected that every old woman should have such a gem of a story to produce, always in exactly the same manner, for the delight of her visitors. Sarah might be a very good person in her own way, although certainly inferior to Mrs. Leslie.

The children for once avoided the winding way down the glen of the burn, and struck right across the fields to the bridge, Isabel telling a story fitfully as she went, and Elly filling up the pauses in her narrative by attending to a mental one of her own, while Loulou strolled on in front and practised her favourite Scotch songs. When they had crossed the river, the castle was just above them - so near as to be out of sight; two minutes'

walk up a steep woodland path would have brought them to the open green lawn before the door. To the right, along a lower track, lay the scenes of many an exciting event in the life of the Fitzclarences; for there the girls could walk for miles, beside the river and under the trees, meeting never a human being to interrupt their stories. But to-day they turned to the left, and took a broader road, which led past a picturesque mill; and then turned upwards slowly through the sweetest greenery and shade. The three fell into silence as they began to ascend, and the river was already far beneath them, when Isabel paused in the middle of the road and spoke again to her sisters.

"Suppose! If just now we were to see a fairy—a little, little woman, dressed in green, sitting there on the bank, with a high, pointed hat on her head, and a wand in her hand—"

She was laughing, and yet she looked as if she meant what she said; Loulou and Elly were laughing too, but they looked as if they thought her extremely foolish. Certainly, however, the place seemed a likely enough one for such a vision as Isabel had suggested. The river, as well as the road, had turned, and was rippling far below them with a song which seemed almost to have words; the gray castle walls, which had now come into view, looked ancient and ghostly enough to suit any marvellous story; and at the one side, on the bank below the castle, and at the other side, on the bank above the river, there were tall and stately trees, with ivy and honeysuckle twining round their graceful stems, and wild roses and flowering shrubs growing up at their feet.

"And suppose, then," said Loulou mockingly, "your fairy were to offer us three maidens our three wishes—"

"Yes," said Isabel, trying not to be discomposed, "that was what I was going to say."

"Didn't I know it!"

"Well, come now and let us make up our minds what we'd have," said Isabel insinuatingly.

But off went Elly on her own track of nonsense. "O yes! we all know what ought to happen. Says the eldest: 'I want to be famous, like Alexander the Great, or Napoleon.' Says the second: 'I should like to be rich, and have gold and silver plate, and fine things to eat every day.' Says the youngest: 'I should like to be *good*.' —Then comes the moral: 'Dear children, which was the best wish? Was it not little Elly's?'"

The other two laughed, and Loulou murmured the dreadful word, "Hackneyed;" while Isabel was obliged to confess that she *had* read stories very much like the one Elly told. "But never mind," said she, sitting down on the bank beside the road; "let us be as if we were in a story for once. And, do you know, I think every one has a story of their own, if one only knew it. I don't mean when they are children, but when they are grown up." She gazed gravely at her sisters as she spoke, and they stood in front of her and grinned unsympathetically.

"I'd have a story like Miss Mackenzie's, when I was about it," said Elly. "She shut herself up in her room for years and years; and her father said she was to come out, if it cost him hundreds; and she said she would come out, but it would cost him thousands. And away she went to the cannibal country. And she came to an inn—"

"But you know she *might* really have gone to Fiji or the Sandwich Islands," said Loulou, who was more interested in Elly's quotation from the well-known tale than

in Isabel's fairies. And now it was Elly's turn to look discomposed, for she much feared that she had set agoing one of those lengthy arguments between Isabel and Loulou, which were among the greatest annoyances of her life. The two would dispute whether Mrs. Leslie's tale was fiction pure and simple, or an exaggerated account of real travels, with as much heat and persistency as they discussed the character of Charles I., or of Mary Queen of Scots. A "ride on the circular railroad" Elly used to call these profitless debates, which always went round and round the same way, and generally ended where they began.

But to-day, Isabel was occupied with her own thoughts, and paid no heed to Loulou's challenge. "Yes, I do believe every one has a story in their lives," she repeated; "or, perhaps, it would be better to say, a novel or a poem."

"What! even though one has a pug nose?" said Loulou, smiling rather bitterly.

"Oh, not *pug*," said Elly, with a burst of laughter; "say 'tip-tilted like a flower,' and then it will be grand enough for anything—even blank verse."

"But I'm not sure that every one's novel or poem is an interesting one," said Isabel.

Whereupon there was a not unnatural outcry from the other girls. "What's the use of having one, then? Far better none at all than something uninteresting!"

"Well, of course, we would make our story or our poem a success, if we could," said Isabel. "What do you think would do it best? We are all our own heroines, of course—what gift would we choose to make our lives interesting? Let us decide." This was a conversation after Isabel's own heart, and her face was lit up with

pleased, yet dreamy, excitement. "For my part, I should like a great deal of love. What do you say?"

"Beauty for me," said Loulou, without the least hesitation.

"Lots of money, I choose," said Elly, almost as fast.

Isabel looked at her little sister with some surprise. "I wouldn't have expected that from you," she said half reproachfully.

"Oh, but think what lots of things I could do with my money!" said the child with a leap; "what good education the little ones would have, and what a lot of books we'd get for papa! And we would have another addition made to the manse, and a bigger garden; and we would keep a gardener; and papa and mamma would never have to say about anything they wanted that they couldn't afford it!"

The others could not but feel that Elly had justified her choice. The cold, hard gripe of poverty had not been felt in their home, as it is in many a country manse; but they knew very well, every one of them, that their parents needed to use contrivance and self-denial to make both ends of their narrow income meet. Isabel gave a sigh, as she rose and went slowly up the hill with her sisters beside her. "Yours is the least worthy wish of all, Loulou," said she after a minute.

"Indeed, no. I hold to it; and I can get both of yours along with it, too. For, of course, my beauty will make people like me; and, if everybody likes me, of course I can marry the richest man I know; and then I can do all the grand things at home that Elly talks about."

Isabel and Elly protested: first, that it was unfair to get three wishes instead of one, in that fashion; and then, that everybody who was beautiful was not necessarily popular;

and that everybody who was popular did not necessarily make a wealthy marriage. But Loulou only laughed, and declared she stuck to her choice.

"There is no use of getting angry with me, though," she said at last; "for my wish is the only one that can never come to pass. It isn't likely that any one will leave a big fortune to Elly, and it isn't likely you'll grow up very fascinating, Isa; still, it's possible, you know. But my beauty will never come to me." Her voice had a desponding tone in it, as she spoke the last words; and Isabel and Elly were touched, but felt they could not truthfully give much comfort, for their sisterly estimate of Loulou's personal attractions was no higher than her own.

"You're not ugly, Lou, I think," said Isabel doubtfully; "I'm not sure that you aren't rather nice-looking sometimes. We're none of us *very* plain, are we?" she added wistfully, seeking for a reassurance in her turn.

But Loulou only said, "Well, I suppose we ought to be thankful for small mercies."

"Oh, but I *wish* we could have our wishes!" Elly burst out.

The girls were on the open hill-top now, and, pausing to take breath, turned round and looked upon the country behind them. The view was quite changed at this side of the river: their own village, with the church and manse, stood high and bare opposite them; the familiar mountains, rising behind it, had grown much loftier, and the expanse of country around it wider. Something in the scene suited the mood of the children, who were looking out into the future with vague yearnings and eager aspirations. "How blue and beautiful it is in the distance!" said Isabel, taking off her hat to let the wind blow on her

face. "And our wishes—yes—if we only *could* get at them—"

"But do you mean to go and see your old woman at all?" asked Loulou, unceremoniously breaking in upon her reverie. And indeed the interruption was not untimely, for they were only a few steps from Sarah's dwelling, a low, long cottage, a little off the road. Very reluctantly, almost sulkily, Isabel turned towards it; while Loulou and Elly ensconced themselves in the shade at a little distance to wait for her return.

"Come back soon, and tell us about Cecily," Elly called after her.

"You may be sure I won't stay longer than I can help," was the answer; but Isabel was not thinking of the Families. The ideas she had been suggesting to her sisters had taken a much stronger hold on her mind than they had done on either of theirs, and it was impossible to get rid of them. Certainly it was well for Isabel that she so seldom imagined a story with herself for the heroine. She could endow Aimée Fitzclarence or the Princess Cecily with all sorts of graces, favour, and beauty, and feel only pleasure and a certain mild excitement, quite unmixed with envy, in the doing of it. But now, after her dream about great things for herself, she felt all her pulses quickened and her spirit feverish, in the intensity of her dissatisfaction with the present and longing for something to come. And so she passed through the outer door of the cottage, and knocking at the white wooden one within, heard the voice bidding her enter, with the same sort of weary annoyance that she felt when Maggie's call aroused her from a pleasant sleep in the morning.

The one room which was Sarah's home was daintily clean—kept so by the neighbour who lived at the other

end of the cottage. A few twigs smouldered among the light gray ashes on the hearthstones; and beside them, on a low wooden chair, with her face towards the window, sat the old woman Isabel had come to see. She turned her head as the door opened; and in answer to the inquiring *sightless* look that met her, the visitor had to explain who she was. "I'm Isabel—Mr. Maitland's daughter." Then there was a smile of welcome; and the girl, holding the frail old hand in hers, had to guide Sarah back to the seat which she *would* quit to receive her, before she herself took a similar one at her side. Isabel did her best to answer questions about her father and mother, and afterwards, at the old woman's request, got out the Bible and read -yet all the time was thinking her own thoughts.

Sarah was not at all a romantic old woman, either in appearance or disposition. She was little and round-faced, and pleasant-looking enough, but had nothing striking about her features; nor was her talk made interesting by any of that quaint humour and originality which belong to what is called a "character." She had not been away from Abbotsmuir in all her life; ever since Isabel could remember, she had dwelt in the same room: it had never been said that a single adventure had happened to her. And yet, according to the theories the young sentimentalist had propounded to her sisters, Sarah was the heroine of a novel or a poem. Had it been a beautiful and interesting one, she wondered; or only a dull, commonplace, humdrum story, very tiresome and very long? The answer was not difficult to find, Isabel thought.

Outside, on the green hill, with God's beautiful sky above them, the three girls had made their choice of the good things they fain would have to go through life with. Per-

haps Sarah too had done the same, in the far-away days when she was young, and the world was not yet darkened to her sight. If that were the case, how grievously had she been disappointed! Was it wealth she had wished for, as Elly had done?—Sarah lived on the small allowance she got from the parish, and such little presents as the neighbours' charity bestowed upon her. Or was it beauty she would have chosen, like Loulou?—there was none now in the wrinkled old face; nay, Isabel could be almost sure it had never dwelt there, even when the cheeks had their youthful bloom, and the dimmed eyes were open and bright. Or, like Isabel herself, had she thought that love and liking were the things most to be desired?—Sarah had now not a single relation near her; as far as Isabel knew, she had none at all in the world. The girl looking out on her own future with eager, wistful hope, thought there could not be a drearier story than the one she read in this old woman's life. Her imagination and memory were busy with it, all the time that her lips were mechanically dropping the words of the Bible into the ears of Sarah, who bent a little forward to listen, and sat motionless till Isabel's voice ceased.

"That's a beautiful chapter!" said Sarah then, relaxing her attitude of attention. And Isabel put the book down on her knee, and turned her eyes on her companion, who, all unconscious of the perplexity and pity in the young face at her side, sat calm and silent as before. That bright, patient look, had been familiar to Isabel since her childhood; for in the days when Sarah could go to church, her place was in the very front of the pulpit, and therefore full in view of the little ones in the "minister's seat." They had had their jokes too at home about the old woman who always answered their father's inquiries about her

health with the same phrase, "Thank ye, sir; I canna compleen;" and Loulou had won fame for herself by her successful imitation of the cheery, chirruping tone the words were spoken in. Yet none of them had spent many thoughts upon Sarah: it needed that Isabel should dream about her own future, before she could be interested about the old woman's past, and ponder over the mystery of her loneliness and content. Was it possible that her feelings had been blunted by age and want of use, and her heart and soul had dried up as she sat alone in the dark, so that now she neither wished nor hoped for anything better than the dreary monotony of her solitary and uneventful life? To imagine that was far more horrible than to think of Sarah as keenly miserable. For if death spared Isabel she too would grow old—neither wealth, nor beauty, nor love could keep her from that—and she shuddered and turned pale as she fancied herself blind, and deaf, and infirm; but, worse still, cold-hearted and unfeeling, though with an instinctive, animal-like clinging to life.

The next moment Isabel was ashamed of her thoughts, feeling that though Sarah was beyond her comprehension, the kindly old woman could be no such withered-up creature as her morbid fancy painted. She roused herself and read on, but she was conscious that her dreams had left her vaguely miserable and unsatisfied. That evening, alone in her room, Isabel re-read those chapters and psalms which seemed to sound so sweetly to old Sarah; but when she went over them in the cottage, she exercised the art she had learned in much reading to her juniors, and, while giving the words correctly enough, had her mind as much abstracted from her task as if she were letting Archy hear one of his beloved nursery tales for the fiftieth time. It was over at last; Sarah's grateful thanks

received; the Bible put back in its place. But still Isabel lingered; she felt she could scarcely go without a few words of sympathy. "You must be very dull living here alone?" she said with a wistful curiosity in her pity. What would the answer be? she wondered. Scarcely the old "I canna compleen;" for "complaining," in Sarah's sense of the word, meant confessing to feeling ill, and she could scarcely refuse to do that now when she found it a long and fatiguing journey to creep to the door for a breath of fresh air. Besides, the question this time was scarcely one of health. Isabel had asked how Sarah was, as in duty bound, when she entered the cottage, and had stored up the information she received to give again to her father when he returned home. It was of the old woman's mental well-being she would fain know now, though she had little hope of finding out what she wanted.

She was mistaken, however. Sarah looked up, quietly, brightly as usual; speaking in her patient, cheery voice, as if she gave the most commonplace answer possible.

"I'm waiting for the Lord's time, and His time's worth the waiting for."

There was no halo round the head of the aged saint, no celestial glory filled the lowly room, and yet Isabel felt as if she were on holy ground. God had been in this place, and she knew it not. Sarah's home was the very gate of heaven.

"Waiting for the Lord's time, and His time was worth the waiting for." The simple brevity of the words, and the ordinary tone in which they were spoken, impressed Isabel more than anything else would have done. For it seemed as if Sarah was so certain of the facts she stated, that either raptures or protestations would have been out of place. "Waiting for the Lord's time." His taking her to

himself that must mean—what Isabel had been thinking of a minute ago as the lonely and miserable death which was to put an end to the lonely and miserable life. But the Lord's time was worth the waiting for, Sarah said; and the minister's daughter, familiar with Bible words, remembered immediately that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed. Why, then, this old woman sitting still in her chair with folded arms and sightless eyes, the world's pleasures (if they had ever existed for her) left behind long ago, was happier than the children in their bright sweet youth, looking forward in eager expectation to the joys that earth was to give them. Isabel was waiting for her story; Sarah was waiting for God.

Isabel had read about this sort of thing, of course. I am not sure that she and Loulou had not read too many religious books. If the stories were well written, they were touched and interested; if not, they were inclined to scoff a little. But in neither case did they ever think of them as realities; they were pictures to be criticised or admired according to their fancy. Perhaps none of us can learn much from the experience of others: at any rate, Isabel, seeing for the first time a saint of God with her feet on the threshold of heaven, felt as if a new thing had happened in the universe.

And now that the girl had found the key to the old woman's life, what had seemed so dreary and dark was suddenly revealed as bright and sweet beyond all human fancy. For such good things as Sarah had not yet obtained, would be given in the very near future; and there was no possibility of disappointment for her whose wishes were one with God's. Did she want riches?—she was a joint-heir with Christ; for her there was reserved an inherit-

ance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Beauty?—a daughter of God: the promise ran, that when He appeared she should be like Him. Love?—what compassed the poor blind woman now and for ever was a love whose breadth and length, depth and height, passeth all knowledge. Isabel had been looking for a novel or a ballad in Sarah's life, and she had found a hymn, the music of which roused echoes in her own heart that were never to die away.

For what I have told you now shortly, took Isabel a long time to think out—was, in fact, the lesson, not of one, but of many days. Awe-stricken and solemnized, shaken suddenly out of her vain dreams, she accepted the revelation at first without trying to explain it. She touched Sarah's hand with a tender reverence as she bade her farewell, and latched the door behind her softly.

The wind blew fresh on her hot cheeks; the summer landscape was all sparkling before her; across the road among the trees Loulou and Elly nestled snug and half-concealed, their big hats the only distinguishing things about them. Isabel went slowly to join them. She had climbed the bank, and was on the grass beside them before they heard her steps.

"What have you been doing? why were you so long?" were the first exclamations. But when they caught sight of her face, their questions changed into, "What is it, Isabel? What have you seen?"

"I have seen some one who's waiting for God," said Isabel.

After all, how little there was to tell! And yet that one half-hour in the little cottage had changed all Isabel's feelings. Once more she stood with her sisters on the open hill-top, and paused to gaze, ere descending again into

the darkness of the woods. Before her lay the wide expanse of hill and dale, and the distant mountains in their beautiful blue. But the country Isabel was yearning for now was further away, and yet nearer, than the dreamland of her girlish hopes: the gift she had chosen to beautify her life was the good thing God has promised shall be given to those who ask.

"I take back my wish," she said; "and I don't want any fairy, for I'm in earnest now."

"Weren't you in earnest before?" put in Loulou.

"Well—perhaps very nearly." And over the gravity of Isabel's face there came for a moment an expression of gentle, half-amused shame, which silenced the impudent young sister immediately. "I'm in earnest now, at any rate. If I *might* choose (and this time I believe I may), I should like to be an out-and-out Christian—a thorough one, I mean—all my life, and when I die."

Then Elly came across the road to walk beside Isabel. "I choose the same as you," she said.

So the three went down beneath the trees, Loulou walking a little in front, and sticking flowers into her hat. Isabel, not expecting her to sympathize, was only grateful for her silence. She had feared at first that she might exclaim, "Now, isn't this a beautiful ending to our wishes, just like Elly's goody story?" And to ridicule of that sort the manse children were painfully, foolishly sensitive.

But not another word was spoken among the girls till their steps had rapidly descended the steep and winding path they had gone up in so leisurely a fashion, and again they reached the river-side. Then, on the opposite bank, rising up out of the thicket, there were seen two fishing-rods unsteadily borne aloft; and the next moment the

whole nursery party appeared in view — Maggie marching tall and stalwart in the midst, with Dolly clinging to her dress by one hand, and clasping Dollibella in the other. Whenever the little ones descried their sisters, signs and shouts were interchanged in the most energetic fashion; and many useless threats and blandishments were employed in trying to make Dandy swim the river. After that had to be given up, and the children were turning homewards, Elly scampered away to join the little ones; but the elder girls lingered still, and made a halt for a while on the bridge, leaning over the wooden railing to gaze into the amber water beneath.

"The river is low to-day," said Isabel. "The current is scarcely strong enough to make me feel I am going away with it. I can look down at it just now without being giddy."

"It couldn't be very low after last week's rains," said Loulou; "I daresay Dandy was wise, after all." She had stripped the flowers from her hat again, and was dropping them one by one into the water. "All withered and worthless already!" she said, as she leaned far down to watch them as they floated away.

Isabel gazed at her sister dreamily, with the rush of the water in her ears, and her thoughts still full of old Sarah and the peace in her worn face.

"You were very good not to laugh at me," she said impulsively at last.

Then Loulou let all her roses fall, and turned round upon her quickly: "*Why* did you expect me to laugh at you?"

"I was afraid you would," said Isabel gently. "Oh, it would have been quite natural if you had, I know! You didn't see the old woman as I saw her; and it is so difficult to make other people understand about some things."

Loulou stood calm and straight on the middle of the bridge, adjusting the trimming of her hat, which had been somewhat disarranged by its floral decorations. "You expected me to laugh, did you, because you said being a Christian was the best thing to wish for?"

"Well, not *laugh*," said Isabel, seeing Loulou was displeased; "perhaps not *laugh*. I think I meant *sneer*. You know," she added quickly, as she felt that her explanation had not much mended matters, "I don't mean you would have sneered if a proper person had said it; but being only me—I really want to thank you for not making fun of me."

"There you go again!" cried Loulou; "always expecting the worst from me! Of course, if you think thoughts that are better than usual, it's quite impossible I should have them too. We all go up the hill talking nonsense; and, of course, I was the only one who came down wanting to do the same. Elly joins in with you when you talk good; but if I don't laugh, it's only because I'm trying very hard not to. Trot out your French now; say, 'Cela va sans dire.'"

Loulou, fierce in her bitterness, turned away from her sister, and leaned over the railing again.

"I meant to please you, not to make you angry," said Isabel, perplexed. "If you think as I do, Loulou, I'm very glad; but how could I know it when you laugh so much at stories—"

"It was Elly who made that story about the three wishes; not I, remember."

"Oh!—Elly. Yes; but everybody knows what *Elly* thinks," said Isabel.

"And just because I can't speak like you and Elly, you make up your mind I never feel," said Loulou, with a passionate break in her voice that was almost a sob.

Isabel stared in blank astonishment. Loulou not being able to speak was truly a new idea. Her own shyness had been so long an acknowledged fact, that she had got into the habit of hiding a good deal of laziness as well as awkwardness under cover of it; but Loulou's ready tongue and cool self-reliance had always been ready to supply her sister's deficiencies.

"None of us can talk like you, Loulou!"

"Yes, of course; it's easy enough to talk about the weather, and the game-laws, and those things one doesn't care a rap about," said Loulou, recklessly contemning in her excitement all the special interests of Abbotsmuir: "but when it comes to things we *do* feel, you and Elly can talk like anything, but all the words seem to go away from me."

Then Isabel sidled up to her sister on the bridge, and put her arm round her.

"I know it's stupid of me," Loulou went on more softly. "Let me try to tell you, then. I *did* understand about your old woman when you were telling us about her. I won't deny I thought you silly when you first began talking about wishes, but I *didn't* think so at the end; for I *do* think about other things than about my sewing, or wishing to be pretty, or keeping my clothes tidy. I do! I do!"

She was clutching the upper bar of the railing tight in her earnestness.

"I'm very glad," said Isabel tenderly. "Forgive me for not guessing it, Louly; but how could I when you never said a word?"

"Can't I say the same to you?" said Loulou, after a moment. "Until to-day you never breathed a word to me, or before me, about being a Christian, or about such

things as Christians think about. You may have talked in that way to Elly, — I believe you did, — but it was always when I wasn't there. And yet you generally speak a great deal about your feelings, Isabel."

"Too much, I suppose you mean," said Isabel sadly. "Oh, Loulou, how wrong I've been again, and I didn't know it! When I first came home I was ashamed and cowardly; and since then—after we quarrelled—how could I talk to you of good things? I daren't do it to Elly; and as for you!—you might well have laughed; you might well have sneered. For, of course, whenever I began to speak, you could have said, '*This* is the girl that behaved so ill to me!'"

Isabel's voice failed her, and she clung faster to Loulou; partly for love's sake, and partly because her hold of that slight little figure seemed to support her own above the swiftly flowing current of the river. And Loulou's face turned round to hers, with deep tenderness in it, and a touch of admiration—such a look as Isabel had never seen her give to any one but their mother:—

"Don't you think, perhaps I might have said, 'This is the girl *I* behaved so ill to—and she forgave me!'"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST LETTER.

"We cannot see before us;
But our all-seeing Friend
Is always watching o'er us,
And knows the very end.

"What though we seem to stumble?
He will not let us fall;
And learning to be humble
Is not lost time at all."

FRANCES R. HAVERGAL.

AND now the time had come for Mr. and Mrs. Maitland to quit the country of virgin-white mountains and blue lakes, and turn their faces homeward again. One more letter the children wrote them, and they all signed their names to it; even Dolly made her mark proudly at the end, though I doubt whether she understood much of the contents of the document. By the older ones the matter had been all well weighed, however, and the wording of their letter carefully considered, though there had been no open council held on the matter.

"We write you this as a warning," they said, "in case you come home expecting that we have managed very well, and done as we ought while you were away. That was what we hoped, and promised to you we would do; but we have failed miserably. We have all made mis-

takes and behaved ill; especially we big ones, who have been showing very bad examples. We did not think it would have been this way, you know; but it is best you should hear the truth as soon as possible. We had a curious feeling beforehand, that this month of being all alone was to make a great change in us, and that you would find us much older and wiser when you came back again. Please don't expect *that!* We are just as we were, except that perhaps we feel ourselves younger and stupider. We have learned nothing—unless learning our own ignorance is anything. But oh, we are so glad that *one* good thing has come out of all this, and papa is better of the change! And we shall be so dearly glad—we can scarcely think of it for joy—to get you both back again."

This letter was awaiting Mr. and Mrs. Maitland when they arrived in Edinburgh; and they read it very carefully and sympathetically, but without so much alarm and disappointment as the children had perhaps anticipated. They were, indeed, inclined to think that the knowledge of our own ignorance is no easy or unimportant lesson, although it was not at all such a one as Isabel and Loulou had expected to learn.

And when they came home, and heard the story, told with full particulars and extreme candour, of all that had been done while they were away, they were by no means sure that the children had altogether managed badly, and failed miserably in their attempt at self government, or that the month when they kept house alone in the Abbotsmuir Manse was a time to be so much ashamed of after all.

Young Lady's Library.

The Heiress of Wylmington. By EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN, Author of "True to the Last," etc. Crown 8vo, cloth extra, gilt edges. Price 5s. *Cheaper Edition*, 4s.

"There are some remarks in its pages with which sensible people of every creed and every shade of opinion can scarcely fail to sympathize....It is pleasantly and prettily told."—SATURDAY REVIEW.

Temple's Trial; or, For Life or Death. By EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN, Author of "The Heiress of Wylmington," etc. Crown 8vo, cloth extra, gilt edges. Price 5s. *Cheaper Edition*, 4s.

An interesting study of character, going mainly to show the beauty of a quiet, manly Christian life; on the other hand the terrible moral degradation to which selfishness unchecked may lead.

Winning the Victory; or, Di Pennington's Reward. A Tale. By EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN, Author of "The Heiress of Wylmington," etc. Post 8vo, cloth extra. 3s. 6d.

A very interesting tale for young people. The charm of a thoroughly unselfish character is displayed, and in one of an opposite description the idol Self is at last dethroned.

Rinaultrie. By Mrs. MILNE-RAE, Author of "Morag: A Story of Highland Life," etc. Crown 8vo, gilt top. Price 5s. *Cheaper Edition*, 4s.

"We heartily commend this fresh, healthy, and carefully-written tale, with its truthful and vivid pictures of Scottish life."—ABERDEEN FREE PRESS.

On Angels' Wings; or, The Story of Little Violet of Edelsheim. By the Hon. Mrs. GREENE, Author of "The Grey House on the Hill," etc. Crown 8vo, gilt edges. Price 5s. *Cheaper Edition*, 4s.

"Is interesting from the intensity of human feeling and sympathy it develops."—LITERARY WORLD.

Mine Own People. By LOUISA M. GRAY, Author of "Nelly's Teachers," etc. Crown 8vo. Price 5s. *Cheaper Edition*, 4s.

It is a work of great human interest, and all the more is it human because it recognizes the supreme human interest—namely, that of religion, and the strength, purity, and gladness which religion brings to them who receive it in its simplicity and power. A wholesome, suggestive, and wisely-stimulating book for young women.

Nelly's Teachers, and what they Learned. By LOUISA M. GRAY, Author of "Ada and Gerty," etc. Post 8vo, cl. ex., gilt ed. 3s.

A tale for the young. Alice and Lina, while themselves children, trying to teach on Sunday evenings a very young and ignorant child, become learners also in the best sense of the word.

Ada and Gerty; or, Hand in Hand Heavenward. A Story of School Life. By LOUISA M. GRAY, Author of "Dunalton," etc. Post 8vo, cloth extra, gilt edges. 3s.

A touching story of two girls, giving an interesting account of their education and school experiences.

The Children of Abbotsmuir Manse. A Tale for the Young. By LOUISA M. GRAY, Author of "Nelly's Teachers," etc. Post 8vo, cloth extra, gilt edges. 3s.

"This is a book we should like to see in the hands of children. It will help them to be both happy and good."—DAILY REVIEW.

Dunalton. The Story of Jack and his Guardians. By LOUISA M. GRAY, Author of "Nelly's Teachers," "Ada and Gerty," etc. Illustrated. Post 8vo, cloth extra, gilt edges. Price 3s.

"A well-conceived, well-told, and deeply interesting story."—PRESBYTERIAN MESSENGER.

T. NELSON AND SONS, LONDON, EDINBURGH, AND NEW YORK.

Stories of Home and School Life.

Stepping Heavenward. A Tale of Home Life. By the Author of "The Flower of the Family," etc. Post 8vo, cloth extra. Price 2s. 6d.

A tale of girlhood and early married life, with discipline and trials, all resulting in good at last. Every girl should read this remarkably truthful and fascinating book.

Ever Heavenward; or, A Mother's Influence. By the Author of "Stepping Heavenward," "The Flower of the Family," etc. Post 8vo, cloth extra. Price 2s. 6d.

A tale of home life, with its ordinary joys and sorrows, under the guidance of its leading spirit,—a wise, loving, pious mother.

The Flower of the Family. A Tale of Domestic Life. By the Author of "Stepping Heavenward," etc. Post 8vo, cloth extra. Price 2s. 6d.

A tale of home life,—the central figure being an unselfish, devoted, pious eldest daughter.

Changed Scenes; or, The Castle and the Cottage. By Lady Hope, Author of "Our Coffee House," "A Maiden's Work," "Sunny Footsteps," etc. Post 8vo, cloth extra. Price 2s. 6d.

An interesting story for girls, of two English orphans and their guardian, in the course of which valuable moral and religious lessons are conveyed by some pleasing allegories.

Almost a Hero; or, School Days at Ashcombe. By Robert Richardson, Author of "The Story of the Niger," "Ralph's Year in Russia," etc. With Seven Engravings. Post 8vo, cloth extra. Price 2s. 6d.

A Thorny Way. By Mary Bradford Whiting. Post 8vo, cloth extra. Price 2s. 6d.

A very interesting story, in which the character-sketches show no little discernment.

A True Hero; or, The Story of Amos Huntingdon. A Tale of Moral Courage. By Rev. T. P. Wilson, M.A., Vicar of Pavenham; Author of "Frank Oldfield," "True to His Colours, etc. Small crown 8vo, cloth extra. Price 2s. 6d.

A tale illustrative of moral courage, with examples taken from real life.

Aunt Judith. The Story of a Loving Life. By Grace Beaumont. Post 8vo, cloth extra. Price 2s. 6d.

A simple and touching story of the blessed influence exerted by a Christ-like life (Aunt Judith's) on all who came in contact with it.

Edith Raymond, and the Story of Huldah Brent's Will. A Tale. By S. S. Robbins. Post 8vo, cloth extra. Price 2s. 6d.

A curious story of the forging of a will, in his own interest, by an avaricious lawyer, of the immediate consequences of the deed, and of the peculiar way in which it was discovered, and the humiliation of the forger.

Follow the Right. A Tale for Boys. By G. E. Wyatt, Author of "Archie Digby," "Lionel Harcourt," "Harry Bertram," etc. Post 8vo, cloth extra. Price 2s. 6d.

The hero of this story is an Etonian who is possessed of a moral nature remarkable for its strength and power; and the book is written with sprightliness and vigour.

T. NELSON AND SONS, LONDON, EDINBURGH, AND NEW YORK.

KX-692-967